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JUSTIN McCARTHY, M.P.

AUTHOR OF

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Justin McCarthy (1830-), late leader of the Irish Home Rulers, was born at Cork. He is a historian as well as a novelist. His first novel appeared in 1851.

TO THE

HON. MRS. F. H. JEUNE.

DEAR MRS. JEUNE,

I have in memory some graceful words in which George Sand dedicates one of her stories to a Spanish lady, her friend. 'The seamen of the Adriatic,' she says, 'when they launch a new boat, never fail to decorate it with the image of some saintly patroness:' and in such spirit she asks 'that your name written on this page, *O ma belle et bonne amie*, may be like the effigy which protects a frail skiff among capricious winds.'

May I borrow this pretty conceit and use it now for my own purpose, when I ask for your permission to write your name on this front page of my book and to dedicate the story to you?

Faithfully yours,

JUSTIN McCARTHY.

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THE COMET OF A SEASON.

CHAPTER I.

'LOWLINESS IS YOUNG AMBITION'S LADDER.'

THE teller of this story has a strong objection to the mysterious in fiction. He is quite willing that the personages in the tale should get involved in bewilderment and confusion as often as occasion requires. But he holds to it that the reader ought to have a clear understanding all the time of the real meaning and explanation of everything that seems a mystery. Some of the plays of an otherwise not very meritorious dramatist, the elder Crébillon, always seem to him in one part of their arrangement to furnish a pattern to the composers of all fiction, whether in the form of the drama or in that of the romance. Crébillon filled certain of his plays with puzzles. Nobody came out in the end to be the person he seemed to be. Either he was passing off for somebody not himself, or he honestly believed himself to be somebody that he was not. Torturing complications thereby arose; but only for the people in the play. There was no torture for the audience. Crébillon, by one simple and bold device, saved them all pangs of conjecture and torment of doubt. The list of 'personages of the drama' prefixed to each play carefully explained the identity of every character. Something of this kind was set out—'Alceste, a young man believed to be the son of the peasant Pierre, but in reality the son of the Count de l'Espée. Bianca, supposed to be a gipsy girl, but afterwards discovered to be the long-lost daughter of the Marquis de Monteville.' Thus the audience were let comfortably into the secret at the beginning, and never had to turn mentally back and hastily revise their first impressions about any of the personages. I have long since forgotten all about Crébillon's plays, except this arrangement of his *dramatis*

personæ; but that has always appeared to me charmingly inartificial, straightforward, and deserving of the gratitude of men. In the story I am now about to tell, I shall, after my own different fashion, bear this principle in mind. Any little mystery that is in it shall be only for the persons who move in the drama, and not for the readers.

I would therefore ask those readers to turn back with me for a few pages to a period before that at which the connected action of the story begins. One glimpse at a quiet scene which passed some fifteen or sixteen years earlier than that day will be enough to put the reader in full possession of much that was a secret to men and women of whom the story is told, and which, if known by them in time, might have influenced so significantly their actions and their lives as to leave no story worth the telling. Yet even that scene, if it could have been looked on by some of the persons in the story, would not have made things as clear to them as a few slight hints of explanation shall make them to the reader. To learn that a man is not really what he professes to be, might, after all, give a very imperfect and misleading idea of the man's full character. It might lead to a stern, uncompromising verdict, instead of a recommendation to mercy.

On a soft evening of late summer, a young man and a young woman sat on a bench in a small public park just outside one of the great northern towns of England. They were apparently watching the setting of the sun. The sight was beautiful enough to have won the attention of any two young people, if we still cling to the fond idea that young men and women do really care much more for nature and her charms than the seniors with whom the world has been too much, and whose sun therefore may be supposed to have suffered eclipse. But this young man and woman were not really absorbed by the glory of the sunset. *He* was gazing at the west, to be sure; but his eyes did not seem to follow the descent of the sun. *She* was not now looking at the sun; she was looking at him. Her eyes were fixed on him with a wistful, devoted, uneasy look, like that which a French painter has given to the eyes of Sappho as she watches the countenance of her lover, and his unsatisfied gaze into immeasurable deeps of thought; immeasurable, that is to say, for her, or at least not measured by her. Anyone could see that this young pair were a pair—were married. No sister leans so on a brother and looks into his face with a look like that, love she him never so tenderly. Nor, it

is to be feared, does a young lover ever look so fixedly and so far away from the eyes of the girl he loves and has not yet been able to call his wife. These lovers were married; had been married rather more than a year.

The young woman was pretty, winsome, anxious-looking; she was clearly what would be called in the common acceptation of the word a 'lady.' The young man was strikingly handsome; tall, slender, dark, and dreamy-looking. Even a man looking at the two would have admitted that the pretty pale girl was practically extinguished by the remarkable appearance of her young husband. Perhaps a not too keen observer might also have come to the conclusion that this handsome young man was not so distinctly a 'gentleman,' again employing a word in its conventional sense, as the girl was a lady. For all the well-dressed and graceful appearance of the youth, he still had something of what we cannot perhaps describe better than as the 'glorified artisan' air. The powers of witchcraft would not have been needed to enable anyone with his wits about him to reach the quick conclusion that the young wife had somewhat descended from her social position to get to the young lover, and that she adored him all the more.

'The sun is going down,' the girl said. 'Look, love! he will be gone in a moment.'

'Yes,' the young man answered, without turning to her. 'I didn't notice; I wasn't watching him.'

'I thought you were absorbed in the sunset; I wouldn't have said a word to disturb you until he did sink. You ought to have been absorbed in *me*, and not in the sun! but I wasn't jealous; I quite forgive you.'

'But you see I wasn't thinking about the sun,' he said, with a smile, and turning to her for the first time. She almost blushed when his deep eyes rested on hers, and she saw that, for all his inattentive ways, there was genuine affection in them. 'I was thinking of you—all the time; all the time.'

'Oh, come now, that I know is a story. I am sure you were not.'

'Why do you think that?'

'Well, for one thing, because you never looked at me or turned your eyes to mine all the time. No, no; you were thinking of something else. No matter; it was something great and good, I am sure; and I wouldn't have you wasting your intellect always in thinking of a little ridiculous woman, even though she is your wife. So you may confess openly.'

'Well,' he said slowly, 'it is true all the same. I was thinking of you; I was thinking of both of us—of you and me together.'

She gave a little shudder of pleasure, if such a word may be used, and clung closer to him in a nestling sort of way. The public park was very lonely now, at least in that part of it, away from the main thoroughfare and great open walks, and the young wife might nestle as closely as she pleased unseen of critical eyes. Even the sun was no longer there to look at her.

'Yes, I was thinking of us both. I was thinking of our prospects, and our future.'

'Oh! that!' she said. She was not so gladsome as she had been an instant before. 'You are anxious and uneasy; I know your mind is troubled; you are not happy.'

He said, 'I want a career.'

'A career, already!'

'Already! Why, I am three-and-twenty! and men have made themselves a name before that. Already!'

'I didn't mean in that way,' she said. What she had meant was clear enough. She meant, 'We have only been married a little more than a year, and are you already discontented with anything?' If she had been in better spirits she would have asked him, 'Have you not me? Am not I enough?' But she was not in good spirits; something seemed to oppress her; she was silent for the most part, and occasionally inclined to be tearful, for no reason that she could well have explained. Nothing was said for a moment or two, and then she began: 'But you have good prospects, and we are very happy; why should we want anything more—now, at least?'

'It won't always be *now*,' he replied a little impatiently; 'and you don't know, you couldn't know, how impatient it makes one when he thinks he is capable of doing something and can't see his way to doing anything. Look here, love; there are times when I begin to think I shall never come to anything. I get it into my head that I have nothing in me—nothing, nothing, nothing at all. Then I feel as if I should like to kill myself. Yes, I do indeed. I am not talking nonsense.'

'Then you couldn't be happy, even with *me*, if you did not have a successful career and show what you could do?'

'No!' he said desperately, 'I couldn't be happy; it is no use trying to get over that. I couldn't be happy.'

'You don't really care about me; not as I care about you. I could be happy for ever with you—anywhere, anyhow.'

'It is because I do love you that I couldn't be happy without showing that I was worth the love of a woman like you. You could be happy with me anywhere? Yes! but there is all the difference. You have given up everything for me—your people and all; I have given up nothing; I had nothing to give up. I want to show that I am worth something, and that you were not quite mistaken in throwing yourself away on me. That is why I feel so wild sometimes. What if things go on to the end just like this——'

'Oh, if they only would!' she said.

'Yes, yes—in that way it would be happiness, of course, of course; but I mean if they go on to the end without my doing anything to make a name, and your people see that you have married only a commonplace creature, the son of a man who keeps a livery-stable—and himself an office clerk! rather than that, darling—I hope you will be crying over my grave.'

'For shame! I don't believe you love me at all. You are only thinking of yourself, not of me. What do I care whether you make a name or not, whether people admire you or not? I married you because I loved you—you yourself, and not what anyone else—the world or whatever it is—might have seen in you. I saw my happiness in you, I thought. That was enough for me.'

'Don't be angry, darling,' he said soothingly; for he was really fond of her. 'Things will come all right. I'll make myself something of a name. You shan't be always talked of as the office clerk's wife; the livery-stable keeper's daughter-in-law. I'll make a name. I'll be known in the world; you shall be proud of me yet!'

She was chilled and hurt.

'It is not well to set one's heart on such things,' she said. '"Fame flies the pursuer and pursues the flier," I used to read somewhere; I think it was in some school exercise. One may go up like a rocket.'

'And come down like a stick,' he said, smiling complacently. 'Very well; I should like even that better than nothing. The rocket does go up, don't you see, and flames and sparkles, and people stop to look at it. What if it does come down? Everything comes down sooner or later. I'd rather be the rocket than the gas-jet in the office, that people turn on when they like and off when they like, and never say anything about. Besides,' he added more gravely,' I shall not be the rocket. I don't want to shine for a moment or two without any purpose. I want to be

known as one who did great things for his fellow-man and the world; and I shall be known in that way some day. I don't want merely to explode; oh no! I want to blaze.'

'Wasn't there,' she said, '"one who blazed the comet of a season"?'

'I don't know—I haven't read much poetry. But I should rather be the comet of a season than not blaze at all.'

Then throwing himself back on the bench and clasping his hands behind his head with the manner of one who has settled a question, the young man sat in silence a moment. The girl was silent, too; she looked up at the pale sky in which some faint specks of light were already seen. The young wife's heart was sinking within her. She was egotistic, like all loving women, and she had been under the impression that her love would be career enough for her husband. He, too, was egotistic, but in a different way.

He had repeated with literal correctness the facts of his birth and his bringing-up. He was now a clerk in an office. At the time when he was first put into that position he felt as if his heart were swelling with pride. To be in an office near the Exchange; to be in a great dark room, with desks and clerks, and messengers, with gas burning all day long in the winter months; to be spoken of as one of the young men from Aquitaine and Company's office, seemed to him to open a glorious career for young ambition. For his father was a livery-stable keeper, and it was by the favour and kindness of a patron whose carriages the father took care of, that the youth was lifted from his lowly situation at an age much more mature than that at which boys usually begin to learn business in such a town, and set with his foot on the first round of commerce's ladder to fortune. The town in which he lived was one where colossal fortunes are made in a few days, and truly are often lost again as quickly, and then sometimes remade; where the unknown adventurer of last year is the great luxurious ostentatious merchant prince of to-day. What might not genius and courage do in such a place?

Meanwhile, however, the young man had only his foot on the first round of the ladder. For some time his actual duties were hardly more dignified than those of a messenger. He did not find that he was developing much genius for mounting quickly. He seemed to be very far away indeed from the notice not merely of any of the principals, but even of the superior clerks. While he was still with his father, looking after or

trying to look after the livery-stables, the father had been in the habit of giving lessons in riding to young ladies and gentlemen, and sometimes the son in his absence had taken his place. He gave lessons in a riding-ground specially laid out for the purpose, and he took the pupils out for training-gallops along the roads and in the public park. The boy could ride like a young centaur. He seemed to manage his horse as unconsciously as he managed his breathing—he breathed, and he rode. One of the girls who took riding-lessons of the livery-stable keeper was the daughter of a distinguished advocate and Queen's counsel, Mr. Fanshawe, who came of good family, had a great practice, and being a northern man by birth, had bought a property near the town where the livery-stables were kept. This daughter got her lessons in riding mostly from the livery-stable keeper; but sometimes, too, from his son. These two fell in love. After the young man was transferred to the office they corresponded, and occasionally contrived to meet. He succeeded in convincing her that he was a man of genius in a position wholly beneath him, and before whom one day the world must come to bow down.

Why had he got it into his head that he was a man of genius and a master-spirit? He had as yet done nothing. He had not even written poems or essays or begun a tragedy. He had not made speeches. He was curiously ignorant on most subjects. His reading had been only a few biographies of men who had risen from lowliness to greatness, some metaphysical books of a cheap and easy kind, the 'Count of Monte Christo,' and a life of Mahomet. At the office even the clerks of his own age thought him a stupid fellow. His father never could make much of him, and feared he was hopelessly incapable of getting on, but overlooked all his defects because of the memory of his mother, who died young. Yet it was settled in the young man's mind that he was a child of genius and of destiny, and that the world was yet to hear the loud echo of his tread. Most ambitious and clever or silly young men, when they have such convictions about themselves, have also in their minds some idea as to the path along which they are to move to greatness. One believes himself a poet, another a statesman, another a Michael Angelo of the future, the coming Garrick, the Cæsar of the modern time; but our young man had no set notion of this kind. He had not yet made up his mind as to the sort of greatness he was to have. He was not clear even as to the sort of greatness he should wish to have. He only said to himself that greatness was his destiny,

and left Fate to do her duty. Perhaps it was his figure; perhaps his beautiful deep, dark, dreamy eyes; perhaps his singularly handsome face, looking a little like that of a young Lucifer before the rebellion and the fall; certain it is that he easily convinced Miss Fanshawe that in loving him she loved dawning genius and predestined greatness.

It was not for that Miss Fanshawe loved him. She did not care whether he had genius or not, whether he became great or remained small. She loved him because she loved him: loved him for himself. So she at last 'kicked over the traces,' as the livery-stable keeper expressed it, and married her lover in defiance of her father, mother, and all her friends. From the day when she left their house secretly to be married, her father and mother never saw her again. Not that they would not have been reconciled with her in time; but they waited for her to submit, and she waited for them; and some months beyond a year passed away, and then their daughter was dead. She died a few days after the scene in the park, in child-birth—if that can be called child-birth which brings forth only a dead child.

Had she in the latter days of their married life been touched by any doubts as to the true worth of her idol? Probably not. Probably she had only been hurt now and then at the thought that love was not enough for him. It is all the same now—she is gone for ever.

On the very morning before her death, the child of genius received a formal dismissal from Messrs. Aquitaine's office. He was considered incapable and idle, and they would have no more of him. He sat all the night with his dead wife and his ruined hopes. He had not gone near his father for months and months, proudly convinced that they were not made for each other; and he would not go near him now. He sat all the night alone and steeped in thought. All had gone from him. He was down to the lowest deeps of depth. He had not a friend on earth. He had only a few pounds in money, and even that was the poor wreck and remnant of some money *she* had had left to her by a relative in days when there did not seem the slightest probability of her ever having any occasion to spend it. Such was his state. Clearly, if he was to be taken in hand by Destiny, the time had about arrived when Destiny ought to be looking after her charge.

At the funeral of his wife, his father presented himself. They exchanged a grasp of the hand—very warm on the father's part. The livery-stable keeper asked him to come to his house and

stay there. He said he would go there later in the day; and the father felt for him and quietly left him, expecting him to come in the evening, when perhaps he should have calmed down a little. But he did not come that day, nor the next. He never came. He never wrote. His father might have supposed that his son was dead, perhaps had killed himself, but that an acquaintance had seen the young man going on board a steamer, and the young man had told him hurriedly that he was leaving England. He always did things in an odd sort of way, the father said. Anyhow, he was gone.

CHAPTER II.

HELENA AND HERMIA.

CHANGE is rapid in the seaport town where the two married lovers saw the sun set that evening fifteen or sixteen years ago. There are many quiet inland towns of England even still—for all the railways, and the telegraph, and the electric light—where no greater innovation has been made within that time than the adornment of the principal inn with a new sign, or at most the starting of a rival hostelry. But in this busy, unresting place of which we are speaking, new suburbs, stretching for miles, have grown up; acres of newly-built docks have encroached upon the river's banks; sweet spots that were greenwood by the water in the love-making days of pretty Miss Fanshawe are now occupied by factories and warehouses; the very park in which the lovers sat that evening was cut up soon after and parcelled out in lots for building, and is now fully built over. The park was not large enough for the increasing population, and a splendid new park, of much larger extent and greater pretensions, was opened at the opposite end of the town. On the very spot where the poor absurd child of genius sat and bemoaned himself that he had not yet found a career; where his young wife looked up into his face with anxious eyes, that might have been lit by corpse-candles, so ominous was their gleam—on that very spot now, perhaps, some happily-married pair were settled down under their own roof-tree, and gladsome children were playing in the nursery. In our civil life, new crops of houses and hearths grow up on the field where lovers, seeking solitude, were glad or grieved once, just as grass and flowers spring up on the plains where a battle has been fought.

The public park of the past day had been planted in one of

the most beautiful suburbs of the town. It stood on the slope of a very gentle hill, and was sheltered from the east wind which vexed people a great deal in the long and chilly springs; and it looked at one side across the river, there safe even still from the incursion of the dock and warehouse builder. The river was broad there; as it went on through the town, it spread out into a mighty estuary; but even here it was a noble stream. So the place where the park had been was turned into the site of one of the favourite nests of the local aristocracy—the men who had made fortunes in shipping and on 'Change, and in all manner of commercial adventures and enterprises. They built themselves lordly pleasure-houses there. They built 'detached villas,' and each man called his villa by some commanding name. They had conservatories and bright gardens below and observatories on the tops of their houses. Some loved great flights of stone steps, with peacocks parading themselves on terraces. As time went on, and fashions in building began to change, some had fantastic houses of red brick, made more intensely Queen-Anneish than anything of Queen Anne's day could possibly have been, or, even for that matter, than Queen Anne herself. Little windows started out like Jacks-in-the-box exactly where they might least have been expected, with bars across them where there was not the slightest necessity for such precaution. Glass was specially manufactured of a thick greenish dinginess, and with bull's-eyes elaborately wrought in, so that the known imperfections of the glass-making craft in the Augustan age of English letters should add to the reality of the careful imitation.

It was said by the friends of one of the enthusiasts in the cause of this architectural revival that he had little mechanical spiders ingeniously constructed to run up and down some of his window-panes, in order to give to his mansion the greater air of eighteenth-century realism, by suggesting the domestic untidiness of the days of Dean Swift. But this seems only like the foolish pleasantry of some outshone rival. It was probably just such a piece of idle invention as the story told of a lover of art in the same quarter, who had his own portrait done by a great London artist, and when it came home had it put up one of the chimneys for some time to smoke it into respectability of appearance, and then spent a whole evening bending and cracking it in all directions, so that its surface might seem like that of some of the masterpieces he had seen in the National Portrait Gallery.

One, at least, of the red-brick houses in this region was really modest and tasteful in its style and all its arrangements. It

wore its Queen Anne garb with the quiet ease of one who, having chosen a suitable fancy costume for a masquerade, is able to wear it properly and becomingly. This house belonged to Mr. Aquitaine, head of a great firm of shippers. Mr. Aquitaine was of Huguenot descent. His people had been settled in that seaport since the revocation of the edict of Nantes, and had always prospered there. The family now counted among the oldest in the town, and the name had actually become associated with the place. It brought to the ordinary Englishman now no suggestion of Huguenots of foreign origin, but only told of the town in which Mr. Aquitaine lived. His name and that of his family were known all over the world where trade was heard of and ships came into port. Mr. Aquitaine had travelled much in his time, but never called it travelling or thought of himself as a traveller. He had even done some African exploring, for the interest of the thing, but he never for a moment regarded himself as an African explorer. Ever since he was old enough to be of any use to the great house, he had been in the habit of going off at a moment's notice to any part of the world whither it might be necessary to despatch him. He went to New York or San Francisco as another man might go to Edinburgh or to Paris. He talked of 'the last time I was in Melbourne—no, the last time but one, I think it was.' If somebody asked him how some friend was getting on in Japan, he might perhaps answer carelessly, 'Well, really I don't quite know; I haven't been in Japan for more than three years; I don't go there now.' When the diamond fields were discovered in South Africa, he went out two or three times just to have a look at them. He was very glad of the annexation of the Fiji Islands, and remarked that every time he went to Fiji he was more and more impressed with the value of the resources and the position that were neglected by the English Government. But he was not the least in the world of a wanderer. He never went anywhere without some practical purpose. He belonged, roughly speaking, to all the local boards and institutions of his town. He subscribed to everything. He made no distinction of creed in his gifts and charities, and spoke on the platforms of all denominations in turn.

Mr. Aquitaine was now about sixty years old. He wore a short, thick, white moustache and no beard. For all his generations of family settlement on English soil, he still had a great deal of the typical Frenchman about him. With a slight change of garb, say to a shabby outworn semi-military undress,

he would have been just the sort of man one might expect to meet near that building in Paris which the English lady in 'Peregrine Pickle' calls the 'Anvil-Heads.' Yet he regarded himself as intensely English, and was in all his views of things, political and other, the most inveterate and uncompromising John Bull. He did not like the Americans; he detested the Russians. He had a poor idea of the Germans. His general notion of the way for England to solve any difficult question in foreign affairs was to occupy some place. His way to improve any uncivilised country was for England to annex it. He had always had great ideas of things to be done in the Levant and in Egypt; and he had done one great thing for himself in the Levant: he had found a wife there. He fell in love with a girl in Rhodes, a sort of Greek with an English mother, and he married her and brought her home. She was at that time beautiful, but she had fallen a good deal out of shape lately, and did little more than stay at home, lie on a sofa, and receive her friends. She was at least ten years younger than Mr. Aquitaine; but he had not lost one fibre of his youthful energy, and she had not a fibre left of hers. They had been married very nearly five-and-twenty years, and for five years had had no child. Then Mrs. Aquitaine had one daughter, and they had no children after. They lived very happily after their fashion. Mr. and Mrs. Aquitaine hardly ever saw each other alone except at night, and not always even then. He would not have her disturbed, and she liked going to bed early. He had therefore a bedroom fitted up for himself on the ground-floor, and whenever he was disposed to sit up late or to rise specially early, was starting off on a journey, or had just come back from some expedition, he betook himself to this room, and so spared the quiet habits of his wife. The house was always more or less full of company. The family never by any chance had it all to themselves. The three would hardly have known it or themselves under such conditions.

A young lady is mounting a flight of stairs in Mr. Aquitaine's house one bright morning in the early spring: she is running very briskly up, and evidently is not troubled with shortness of breath. She is a good-looking girl with a certain serious look, and a way of slightly puckering her eyebrows every now and then as though she were in earnest about things. She had evidently been out-of-doors, for she wore a hat, beneath which only a little of her carefully tucked-up fair hair made its appearance. She reaches a door and knocks: no answer comes from

within. Then she called 'Melissa!' two or three times, and knocked a little more sharply. A faint voice seemed to be heard, languid, and far away.

'Melissa! may I come in?'

Another murmur was heard, which the young lady on the outside assumed to be assent. At all events, she tried the door, found that it was not locked, and went into the room. It was a very large room, and she looked about with a puzzled air.

'Where on earth is the child?' she said aloud.

The room was not furnished after the fashion of sleeping-chambers in the days of Mrs. Masham and Sarah Jennings. It was all got up in some combination or jumble of various Eastern fashions. The ceilings and the wall were painted after the style of a great Moorish building. The floors were tesselated marble, with scattered pieces of Turkish carpet, and piles of cushions here and there. One corner suggested Damascus, and another Delhi. It was very Oriental—almost as much so as some of the Oriental courts in the Crystal Palace, of which, indeed, it at first reminded Miss Sydney Marion, who now stood looking at its various adornments, still holding the handle of the door, and hardly certain whether to go in or to back out. Opening from the other side of the room she saw a little passage, marble-paved and carpet-betossed too, and she could see that it led into a gorgeous-looking bath-room, the entrance of which was half-draped by a carelessly gathered-up curtain. These decorations and appointments illustrated the tastes, not of Mr. Aquitaine, but of his wife and daughter. Was there no occupant of this superb sleeping saloon? Miss Marion looked around in wonder, and might have backed out altogether, but that a faint laugh drew her attention to one spot where she saw a curtain hanging before a sort of recess. She went up, drew the curtain, and discovered a small alcove with a most luxurious bed, and a very luxurious little demoiselle coiled up in it.

'Oh! there you are at last!' Miss Marion said, and she shook her friend by the shoulder.

A murmur only was heard.

'Get up, you lazy little girl! see how the sun is shining! It is so delicious; it's not like anything I ever saw before. Do promise me that you will get up at once.'

The pretty girl languidly half-opened her dark brown eyes, and gave another toss or two in her bed, and shrugged herself together again.

'Do get up, Melissa; won't you, like a dear girl?'

'But I don't want to get up, Sydney. What's the good of getting up?—I've often been up.'

'The lovely morning, the sun, the flowers——'

'I've seen the sun and the flowers, all sorts of flowers—I don't care about flowers—I don't care about the sun; I prefer the moon.'

'But last night you said you would not come out to see the moon. You said you didn't care about the moon.'

'I didn't then: but that was night. This is morning; that makes all the difference. Don't you see?'

Miss Marion laughed.

'I fancy it does make all the difference, and I do see well enough. What a tormenting little dear you are, to be sure! But I do want you to enjoy the morning with me; or I want rather to enjoy the morning with you. You'll come down, won't you, to please me? I am like the little boy in the old nursery story, or something of that kind, who went about teasing all manner of unwilling creatures, the sheep, and the dog, and the cat, and I don't know what, to come and play with him.'

'Which am I—the sheep, the dog, or the cat?'

'Oh! you are none of these—the leopard kitten, perhaps; if such a creature is nice and lazy, and what people call aggravating; if so, there you are.'

'Well, it's all right; I'll get up,' said the lazy girl resignedly. 'One must get up some time in the day, and it is as well to do it now as later, I suppose; that's philosophy, I should think.'

'Hang up philosophy,' said Sydney.

'Come, now, you are always telling me I say rude things and use slang words. What do you say to "hang up philosophy"?'

'But that's a quotation, Melissa; it's from Shakespeare. Don't you know?'

'Then Shakespeare must have been a very vulgar man,' the young lady said decisively. Having thus settled the question, she rolled herself up in a significant way and was silent, thereby implying that the sooner her friend left her the sooner she would get up and prepare to enter on the business and pleasures of the day.

'Just one word, Melissa: you won't go to sleep again?'

'Glamis,' the young lady murmured from among her pillows —'that's *you*—hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor—that's me; I know I ought to say "that's I," but doesn't it sound odd? and therefore Cawdor—that's I or *me*, whichever you please—shall sleep no more.'

'I thought just now you seemed to know nothing about Shakespeare,' said Sydney.

'That's not Shakespeare; it's Henry Irving.'

'What a ridiculous creature you are! You know a great deal more than you pretend to.'

'All right, dear; most people pretend to a great deal more than they know; I may want to redress the balance, don't you see? Well, I'll not go to sleep again. Would you mind sending Priscilla to me if you see her? or if you would just ring the bell for her before you leave the room, that would save a second or two, perhaps; and a second saved is a second earned.'

Miss Marion laughed and rang the bell for Melissa's maid, and then left her companion, and went downstairs and out into the garden. The little sensuous maiden above-stairs hugged herself once or twice deliciously in her wrappings. The morning was mild and soft, and suggested no great need of nestling in bedclothes. But this was a young lady who immensely loved comfort and warmth and indolence, and harmless little luxuries and self-indulgence of all kinds. During the few moments which elapsed before her maid came into the room she had changed her position several times; not that she found herself uneasy in any, but that even for that moment it delighted her to try for some posture of still greater comfort, to seek the ideal position of the moment. But when her maid came and told her her tepid bath was ready, she made a heroine-like effort and actually got up.

It may be safely asserted of Miss Aquitaine that she never yet had had one thought that lasted for a moment concerning any creature or subject outside the range of her own personal impulses, whims, and wishes. Her impulses were often kind and sometimes generous, and then she was kind and generous for the moment; but she never thought of being kind or generous, or did anything because it ought to be done. She was keenly sensitive to pain herself, but never seemed to have got far enough outside her own personal sensations to think whether others were affected by pain or not. She had not the least idea of the value of money, and, indeed, hardly ever had money in her purse, or even in her hand. Everything was bought for her that she wished to have; many things were bought for her before she had time to wish to have them. Her father had made her a little idol and fetish from the day of her birth. Having no other child, he was always wildly alarmed about the health of this one little treasure. Up to the present

hour it was an article of faith in the household that Melissa was in delicate health and required constant care. The girl never had a cough or a cold in her life, was ignorant of the pangs of toothache, and did not know that she had lungs and digestive organs. The superb strength of her constitution could not be better evidenced than by the fact that it had hitherto withstood all the attempts of her father and mother to keep her well, and all her own attempts to make herself ill. She ate and drank whatever she liked, and at any time that suited the whim of the moment; lay in bed as long as she liked, sat up as late as she liked, took six warm baths in one day if she felt inclined. She often did feel inclined to paddle in her bath for hours together, like a South Sea Island girl plashing idly in her sunny waters.

Melissa took a long time to get bathed and dressed, and she did not hasten her movements in the least because of her waiting friend. She rather liked Miss Sydney Marion, but she did not mind letting her wait. In fact, she never thought about the matter at all. Miss Marion was carried off to breakfast by her host, who assured her that it would not be of the slightest use waiting for Melissa, as no one could tell when she would come down, or whether she would have any breakfast when she did come. Miss Marion was out again on the lawn looking at the sparkling waters of the river, all wrinkled and rippling under the light spring wind, when her friend at last came to her side. Melissa was short and dark, with a graceful plumpness which might perhaps in some far-off time develop, as her mother's had done, into what blunt persons would call fat. Just now, however, no one would be likely to find fault. Melissa was a little beauty, and thought so.

'How you must love this river!' Sydney Marion said. She came from a quiet cathedral town, far inland. Her mother was dead; her father and sister were not now in England; she had been staying with an aunt until yesterday, when she came to pass some time with her father's friends, Mr. and Mrs. Aquitaine, and her school-fellow, Melissa. She had never been in their house before, and everything was new and delightful to her.

'I don't care a pin about it,' Melissa said. 'It's always the same dull thing flowing in the same stupid way. Everything is dull. Nothing ever happens. One gets awfully tired. I want something new. If only something would happen!'

'But something always is happening.'

'Oh no! oh dear no! not anything that I call something. I want something quite remarkable to happen.'

'Well, something is happening that I call very remarkable. Don't you call papa's coming home, and coming to stay here, something remarkable? Don't you call our all going to London together something remarkable?'

'Yes, of course; yes, quite so.' The young lady did not appear to be taken all of a heap by the reminder. 'Yes; I am very glad of your papa's coming home, for your sake, dear Sydney.'

'And I hope you are glad of it, too, for your own sake?'

'Indeed I am,' Melissa answered, with a little more earnestness in her tone. 'I know I shall like him very much.'

'Like him! No; that's not enough. You must be very fond of him. You will be.'

'I am sure I shall.'

'Well, then, that is something remarkable; and I call it remarkable, too, that he should bring Miss Rowan along with him.'

'That is perhaps a little remarkable,' Melissa said demurely. 'Do you think you shall like her?'

'Yes; I am sure I shall. She is very lovely, I believe, and full of enthusiasm about everything.'

'Full of enthusiasm about everything! That must be rather trying and tiresome, mustn't it?'

'Not in her, Melissa, I believe; not in her.'

'She must be a regular charmer.'

'I believe she is.'

'Who told you all this about her?' Melissa asked with a slightly quickened interest in her manner.

'Papa, of course.'

'Oh! "Papa, of course"! Yes. Indeed? Does he greatly admire her?'

'Very much, I think. He has quite an affection for her, I am sure.'

'Oh!'

There was silence for half a moment, and then Melissa looked up to her companion, and complacently said: 'Perhaps he'll marry her.'

'Who, Melissa—marry whom?'

'Your papa—"papa, of course"—perhaps he'll marry this delightful Miss Rowan?'

Sydney frowned a little, and her lip quivered.

'You don't know papa, Melissa.'

'But why, Sydney? Why shouldn't he marry, if he is so fond of her? Of course one doesn't like having a stepmother,

and all that; but I suppose these sort of people are not so cruel now as they used to be; and, besides, you admire her so much yourself. I should think it would be quite a delightful arrangement for all parties. I am sure there is something in it. You may depend upon it, Sydney, things will end that way.'

Miss Marion was going at first to allow herself to be very angry; but she thought it would be ridiculous to take any serious notice of such nonsense, and she was beginning to understand her friend's childlike delight in inflicting little punctures of annoyance every now and then. She did not allow herself to be angry, therefore, or even grave.

'You little silly goose,' she said, 'to talk that way of papa! And I can assure you that I don't believe Miss Rowan is the girl to marry in such a way.'

'But your papa is very nice, isn't he—clever, and all that. You always say so. And tall and handsome, isn't he? Why shouldn't she marry him?'

'Stuff, Melissa!'

'I'll marry him if he asks me—fast enough,' the little lady said, very composedly. 'That would be something happening! But I am sure he won't ask me.'

'I am quite sure he won't,' Sydney replied with emphasis.

'Yes?—I don't know. I think he might do worse. I should like immensely to be your stepmother. I should be awfully severe. Well, never mind; let us talk of something else. But first, one word about this Miss Rowan.'

'You will see her soon, and then you can form an opinion of her for yourself.'

'But it was about your opinion of her I wanted to know something. You never saw her?'

'Never.'

'Yet you like her?'

'I know I shall like her very much.'

'Because your papa likes her?'

'Quite so, Melissa.'

'Then do tell me, are you really such an awfully good girl that you actually like people because your parents—I mean your father—likes them?'

'I don't know about being an awfully good girl; indeed, I know I am not an awfully good girl; but it does seem a reason for liking people if one's father likes them, does it not?'

'Oh dear no; quite the reverse, I should say. If papa and mamma like people very much, my natural impulse always is to

dislike them. I thought that was everyone's first impulse. How can one like anybody whom everyone else is always praising—especially one's parents? If I hear them praise any other girl, I always take it as a reproach dealt sidelong to myself. It always seems to mean, "Why are you not a dear, charming, delightful, virtuous angel like this? Why are you not the prop of your father's old age, and the joy of your mother's decaying years, like this blessed creature?" And then, of course, one naturally begins to hate the blessed creature, and to think what a great disagreeable impostor she must be.'

Miss Marion made no comment on these words. They seemed to have set her thinking.

'Sydney, you haven't told me anything about your sister. You know I never saw her.'

'You will soon see her too: I'll leave you to judge for yourself.'

'Don't you like her?'

'My dear little Melissa, what a question!'

'No, but don't you? Don't you really?'

'Like my sister? Of course I do.'

'But you don't get on, perhaps?'

'Well, we have not been much together this long time.'

'I am sure there is something!' Melissa said triumphantly. 'I am so glad! I like to hear of people who don't get on and all that. They seem more like myself. I shall like you ever so much better if you quarrel with your sister; and I shall like her if she quarrels with you. I shall devote myself to the task of making mischief between you. That might be something happening.'

'What a dreadful little animal you would be,' Miss Marion said, 'if you were only a quarter as bad as you make yourself out! But you can't set any quarrel going between Katherine and me; and I know you wouldn't if you could. I almost wish you could, Melissa.'

'Oh! why?' Melissa asked with eyes of beaming curiosity.

'I am not sure that I quite know why; and I am sure that if I did I wouldn't tell you, you naughty little child.'

'How disagreeable of you! You won't tell me anything.'

'I think I have told you a great deal.'

'Then, if I can't set you two women quarrelling, I'll tell you what I will do. I'll start a flirtation with your sister's husband, and make her awfully jealous; that will be capital fun.'

Sydney only laughed at this resolve.

'You'll not be able to do that either,' she said.

'Why not?'

'Well, for one thing, I think Mr. Trescoe isn't given to flirtation. He is terribly shy; Katherine does all the flirtation that is likely to go on there, I fancy.'

'Then there will be all the more fun in drawing him out, won't there? I must be doing something, Sydney; you are all going to be so awfully happy and fond of one another, and I shall be left out in the cold; and if I am not to marry your papa, I really must get up a flirtation with your brother-in-law. Is he nice? Is he handsome—is your sister the grey mare? Oh! I say, let us talk of something else. Here's papa coming; he will think me dreadfully silly.'

'I don't see how he could well think anything else,' said Sydney. 'But I'll not tell tales on you, if you will only promise to be more reasonable for the future.'

'Indeed, I won't promise anything of the kind; I must do mischief of some sort, flirting or quarrelling, or something. How do you do, papa? We have been talking about philosophy and the future life—Sydney and I.'

CHAPTER III.

'WHAT'S IN THE SHIP?—MY SHIPWRECK?'

MR. AQUITAINE came towards the girls. He looked like a young man when seen at a little distance; so straight, strong, and active was his frame. He was rapid and vigorous in his walk, and held his head up with a quick business-like air, the air of a man always ready. He was never slow or undecided in any of his movements, and he never seemed to be in a hurry. He had apparently contrived to combine the vivacity of his ancestral home with the solid composure of the country his people had adopted. He was smoking a cigar; he wore driving-gloves, and had a camellia in his button-hole nearly as large as a star-fish.

'I am going to show you everything while you are here, Miss Marion. We'll take a tremendous drive to-day to begin with; only you and Mel and I. My wife never goes out of the house. The only question is, what to begin at. What are your particular tastes in the way of towns and sight-seeing, Miss Marion? We have got all manner of things on exhibition; river-scenery, landscape, streets, docks, museums, what not. Are you interested in docks?'

'Dear papa, how could Sydney be interested in docks? What girl ever cared about docks? You might as well ask her if she felt interested in tobacco-warehouses.'

'Well, there's a good deal to interest one in the tobacco-warehouses. I'll give her a look at them too.'

'I like to see everything,' Sydney said. 'I love the great broad river because it is so new to me, and so unlike anything we have at home. But I think I should very much like to see your schools—the board-schools.'

Melissa made a grimace expressive of the profoundest distaste for this branch of study.

'And I should like very much to go through the poorest quarters of the town; the streets where the low public-houses and beershops are, and the lanes and alleys, and such places.'

'I am sure I don't want to see any such places,' Miss Aquitaine declared, with a shudder at the mere thought of their existence. 'What a strong-minded girl you are! I should never have thought it—with that fair hair too, and that complexion.'

'Very good,' Mr. Aquitaine said. 'You are quite right, Miss Marion; I am glad to hear you have an interest in such things. I thought it was only up here in the North that women cared much for the condition of the poor, and the schools, and all that. You may depend upon it, I'll take care that you see everything. But Mel won't come. She wouldn't take any interest; and she is hardly strong enough; it's a little beyond her.'

This was quite enough to determine 'Mel' on going.

'Then I am to be left behind to my own company?' she said, 'while you two go exploring and seeing all manner of odd sights! Excuse me, sir and madam, I'll go too. It will be delightful. Quite the Caliph Haroun Al-Raschid sort of thing. Look here, Sydney, I vote we dress in men's clothes.'

'Some of mine,' Mr. Aquitaine suggested.

He was about five feet ten; Melissa about five feet nothing.

'Anyhow, I'll go,' his daughter insisted.

'All right, girl,' her father said complacently. Suddenly remembering something, he turned to Miss Marion: 'I forgot to say I had a letter from your father this morning, Miss Marion.'

She gave an exclamation of eager delight.

'But it tells us nothing—I mean, nothing that you don't know already. It was written days and days before he left

New York, and you know we have had telegrams from him since. We had one after he had actually left New York, sent back in the pilot-boat from Sandy Hook. So, of course, his letter tells us nothing so far as that is concerned; we know he has sailed, and you may make your mind quite easy about him and his companions. They have splendid weather, and a good wind to help them along. They must be half-way across by this time.'

'How soon shall we see him?' Sydney asked anxiously—and she asked only for *him*.

'Oh, well, in a very few days. We shall hear from them when they get to Queenstown. Don't you be anxious; don't think about it at all. He'll be here before you know where you are; before we have half-done these schools. By the way, they have rather a remarkable fellow-passenger, he tells me.'

Sydney did not seem to care much about the remarkable fellow-passenger. But Mr. Aquitaine liked instructing people about all manner of subjects, and having the first of everything. He was not going to let Miss Marion escape the remarkable fellow-passenger so easily.

'You have heard of Montana, Miss Marion, I am sure?'

'A place in America?' Miss Marion said, a little doubtfully.

'Yes, there is a Montana in America, sure enough; but it isn't that Montana that is coming over in the steamer.'

Miss Marion shook her head: she did not know of any other Montana. Mr. Aquitaine was glad, on the whole; it gave him the more to tell.

'Is Montana a man or a woman?' his daughter asked.

'Montana is a man.'

'Sounds more like a woman, doesn't it?' Melissa observed.

'No; it's a queer name, when one comes to think of it; not an American name, certainly. But I don't suppose Montana is an American, except perhaps by birth; I fancy he hails from somewhere in Europe. Anyhow, he is a very remarkable man, Miss Marion. They were talking a great deal about him when I was last in the States, but I never happened to see him.'

'I thought everyone was a remarkable man in America,' Melissa interposed.

Her father went on, addressing himself to Sydney: 'This is really a man out of the common—I have never heard how he began; but he was a soldier in the war—the great civil war, you know; and he left what they call a good record there, and now he is a lecturer, or preacher, or something of the kind, and

the head of a great new school, and has what people call a mission of some sort. I have no doubt he is coming to Europe on some mission.'

'He must be a tiresome old man,' Melissa observed, in her genial way. 'I hate people with missions.'

'It is interesting,' Miss Marion said, after a moment. 'I wonder will papa like him? He doesn't generally like strangers.'

'People are not strangers to each other on board an ocean steamer,' Mr. Aquitaine said. 'Come, young ladies, get ready, and let us be moving; we have a great deal to see.'

'Ah, yes,' Melissa assented, with a sigh of anticipatory weariness.

Sydney heard her, and was almost inclined to feel hurt. But Melissa smiled on her with such a pretty saucy smile of innocent infantile wilfulness that it was impossible to feel angry; impossible not to laugh with the tormenting little creature. Sydney looked anxiously along the river before turning away; it was still all sparkling and full of hope to see. If it had been dark, and the ripples had been ruffled ever so little more than when she first looked on it that morning, she might have taken it as an evil augury. But it still sparkled as if it had only to bear up vessels with youth at their prow and pleasure at their helm; pretty dancing things made in the shape of sea-shells with silken sails, and little cupids playing at seamen, and nereids swimming all around and occasionally pushing the boat along in sport with their dripping shoulders. Sydney was not, in truth, so foolish as to be greatly alarmed about the dangers of the deep for people crossing the Atlantic in fine spring weather and in a great steamer. But she had an anxious way about most things. She was commonly uneasy about her own people, about her father whom she loved, and her sister whom she tried to love. She was almost always thinking whether this or that would be agreeable to her father or not. If anybody were to mention anything in connection with her father's name, her first thought was one of anxious wonder as to whether her father would find himself pleased or not pleased. Now she was distressing her mind a little about the remarkable person coming over in the steamer with Captain Marion, and wondering whether her father would find the companionship an advantage or a nuisance on the voyage.

They saw a great many sights that day, and for two or three days following. Mr. Aquitaine was determined to keep Sydney

going incessantly, in order that she might not have too much time to think of her father on the sea.

He took care that the girl should be very tired when she returned to dinner every day; and he had always a number of people to dine with them. He left her few moments for anxious meditation.

Mr. Aquitaine found that in all things, apart from her over-anxious ways about her father, he had a decidedly practical young woman to deal with in Sydney Marion. He was used to practical girls in the North, but he was under the impression that no such creatures came from the South. He had not faith in the practical work of man or woman farther South than Birmingham, but he was especially inclined to put little faith in the business capacity of woman. In the North, indeed, there were so many practical and efficient women, that perhaps it made home life a pleasant variety to Mr. Aquitaine to have his wife and daughter so absolutely devoid of the practical element. Mrs. Aquitaine was still as ignorant of the working of English domestic, political, or social institutions, as if she had never been out of the Levantine region, and had never read a book or asked a question about England. Melissa did not know, and did not intend to know, anything about such dry subjects as laws and institutions. Mrs. Aquitaine could not have understood if she would; Melissa could have understood, but would not. Mr. Aquitaine was surprised to find how like a genuine Northern girl Sydney Marion was in many ways. She showed a deep interest in schools and workhouses and ventilation, and even rates and taxes. She wanted to know the averages of everything. She examined the little boys and girls at various board-schools, and praised some of those institutions and gravely shook her young head at others.

'Where did you get all this common sense, Miss Marion?' Mr. Aquitaine once bluntly asked. 'I am sure your father hadn't much of it; and from what I saw of your sister Katherine, I don't think she was richly endowed with it either.'

Sydney could not, perhaps, have well explained. Yet the causes were not far to seek. She was three years older than her sister Katherine, and, when their mother died, she was left in charge of the household, being then only eighteen. She soon found that the household had been going to rack and ruin for a good long time before. Her mother was a sweet, bright, clever creature who always looked young, always kept young in face and in heart, was loved by everyone, and let things go as they would. Captain Marion had been in the army for a short time,

but had sold out when he got married, and settled down to enjoy domestic life, and to cultivate his literary tastes. He meant to write a book. He was still writing it. He had put most of his own money and his wife's into American railways, and for a long time it seemed as if he might as well have deposited it in the Atlantic. Sydney had some trouble to keep things straight for a while; and not the least of her troubles was the effort to induce her younger sister to put up with any manner of little privation without too much grumbling. Katherine was very vain, and soon grew mightily fond of admiration, and could hardly endure a life of restriction and dulness. Now, however, the railway property was at last coming to be a genuine thing; Captain Marion seemed likely to be a man of means again. He had gone out to the States to look after his affairs there, and to have the pleasant holiday of a successful man who combines business with pleasure and enjoys both.

Why did not Sydney go with him? Well, Sydney was a sort of pretty girl; but somehow she was not attractive. There are fashions in beauty as capricious, and for their time as inexorable, as the fashions in dress. It is easy to believe in the satirist's account of what happened when the vision of Helen of Troy was conjured up to delight the eyes of a modern group of spectators. The ladies all declared that she was a mere fright and dowdy. It was not their jealousy; the expression was doubtless quite sincere. Helen's beauty was not the reigning style, and to them it was the same thing as ugliness. Sydney Marion was by no means a Helen; but her face might have been thought handsome in the days when oval faces and high foreheads were assumed to be the portion of every true heroine. But by the time she was able to come out in the living world and emerge a little from the almost cloister-like retirement of the cathedral town and her family difficulties, that style of beauty had passed utterly out of fashion. She ought to have a square-cut face and a long chin, and Nature had denied her these attractions. Her hair ought to have come down in a fringe over her forehead, and it refused to do so of itself, and she would not use artificial means to coerce it. Her sister Katherine used to be thought rather a little fright in her school-days, because of her tiny turn-up nose, her sharp chin, and her unmanageable hair. Now she was regarded by everyone as the beauty of the family. Sydney Marion's face was an anachronism; and she was set down as old-fashioned. No doubt the fashion would change, and the oval faces and high foreheads might have their day again; but Sydney

Marion's youth would hardly wait for that revenge of time. She was already in her twenty-fifth year.

Perhaps the consciousness that her face was out of fashion helped to make her somewhat practical and opinionated. She seemed to most people a little hard. She kept her mind somewhat too well regulated. She could have fallen in love, and was longing to love some one; but she had not as yet had a chance. She was wildly fond of her father and her mother; and it always seemed to her that both preferred Katherine. She adored her father, and she felt sure that, with his equable temper and his love for philosophical justice, he must think her a better girl and more devoted daughter than Katherine; and yet he seemed to enjoy Katherine's society more. A handsome young man used to visit them in their country obscurity, the eldest son of Sir Stephen Trescoe, a neighbouring landlord, and Sydney thought she could love him, felt herself drawn towards him, was sure she could confide in him, almost fancied he seemed to show some feeling with regard to her; and he proposed for Katherine, and was accepted, and evidently believed he had carried off the most delightful woman in the world. There was some fear lest young Trescoe's stately and rich family might dislike a marriage with the daughter of a man who appeared to be poor; but no sooner was Katherine seen by the lover's father and mother than they were captivated by her, and metaphorically clasped her to their bosoms. Sydney felt certain that if it had been she they would have been sure to object decidedly to the match. When the young married pair resolved to go with Captain Marion to the States, Sydney made some excuse for remaining behind, and her father, perhaps divining her feelings—he was very quick and sympathetic—fell in with her ideas, and she was left at home to wear her green stockings unseen. Now another alarm had sprung up in her mind; a vague alarm, indeed, and with no reason that she could put into words. Captain Marion had met in the States the daughter of a dear old friend, Colonel Rowan, an Irish officer who had served with him during his short military career. Colonel Rowan was dead long ago, and his widow and daughter had gone out to the United States and taken up their residence with Mrs. Rowan's sister, in some out-of-the-way town—or city, its inhabitants would proudly call it. Captain Marion sought them out, and so warmly renewed in them his friendship for Colonel Rowan, that the daughter was prevailed upon to come over to England with the returning party. Sydney heard of almost nothing but the beauty, the grace, the clever-

ness, the brightness, the accomplishments, the enthusiasm, the affection, the daughterly tenderness, the noble aspirations, and what not of this unique young lady. The whole party, Captain Marion, Katherine, Katherine's husband, seemed in a conspiracy to sound Miss Rowan's praises. Now an alarm arose in Sydney's heart. It was not of the nature that Melissa Aquitaine had kindly suggested. She had not the remotest idea that her father would marry the incomparable young Irish-American. But there was a young man who used to come to see the Aquitaines very often, a young barrister, who belonged to that part of the country, and came that circuit waiting for the time when he should have briefs; and Sydney was a good deal taken with him, he seemed so straightforward and manly and intelligent; and he seemed to like her. He was evidently not in love with Melissa, and Melissa did not care about him. He had known her since she was a child; he used to call her 'Mel,' and chaff her, and be saucily chaffed by her, and it was clearly impossible that such two could ever be in love. Sydney had sometimes, in the most secret recesses of her heart, imagined that he looked at her with eyes of kindly emotion. And now, behold! she is threatened with the invasion of a distractingly delightful and wonderful girl, and it is certain that the moment young Mr. Fanshawe sees Miss Rowan he will fall straightway in love with her. Sydney could not even have the luxury of hating the supposed rival. She was unfortunately too just in mind for that. She was too like her father. She knew it. She knew that if Miss Rowan really turned out worthy of regard, she could never help liking her, even though the girl were to come between her and her dearest hopes. For the moment Sydney was vexed with herself for her absurdly critical and judicial nature, and wished she could hate people for nothing, as Katherine would do, and feel no scruples of conscience. She was accustomed to think a good deal and to study her own mind, and, without any egotism, she knew herself and her own weaknesses pretty well, and she knew that she had a nervous kind of foible for justice, something akin to a physical nervousness, which she could not get over, and which would make her impotent to hate even her enemies—if she had any enemies—and they were not wholly in the wrong. She looked forward with a sinking heart to the coming of this odiously bewitching and cruelly admirable stranger—and Miss Rowan was to go with them to London; to stay a long time with them there; and young Fanshawe lived in London.

'Come, Miss Marion—come, Mel,' Mr. Aquitaine exclaimed

one morning. 'No time to lose; the *Transatlantic* is signalled. We shall only have time to drive down and get on board the tender.'

'The *Transatlantic*—to-day?' Sydney exclaimed, turning pale, and trembling with delight and with the nervous alarm which even delight brings to sensitive and anxious persons.

'Just so. I didn't tell you she was expected so soon. I didn't want you to be exciting yourself before there was any occasion, and counting the moments.'

Mr. Aquitaine's shrewd mind had long since seen into the temper and nature of Sydney Marion.

'Now then, young women, get ready. I'll rattle you down in rather considerably less than no time. My horses can go like those of Mephistopheles.'

'Perhaps you won't care to go, Melissa?' Sydney said, turning to Miss Aquitaine, and putting a kindly hand on her shoulder. She did not want Melissa to be tired and bored about people who were not Melissa's father and sister. Perhaps, too, Sydney thought she could be more free to indulge in all her own feelings without the girl.

'Indeed I'll go,' Melissa promptly answered. 'What an unkind creature you are, Sydney! You know I am longing to see Miss Rowan and Mr. Trescoe, and you know I am only too glad to go in the way of anything out of the regular routine. I want something to happen; not that I think anything will happen to-day.'

'One thing will happen, I can assure you,' her father said. 'We shall be late if you don't be quick; and I know what Captain Marion will feel if he doesn't see his daughter there to meet him.'

They were soon on their way.

Sydney Marion's heart beat strongly as the tender approached the great steamer. She kept straining her eyes anxiously for her father's figure long before she could distinguish one form from another. As they drew nearer and nearer she still could not see him. Now she could plainly see the figure of a tall man who was leaning over the side of the steamer, and looking evidently in the direction of the tender. That must surely be her father. Her eyes were sparkling with anxiety. She was now almost near enough to see his face; it did not seem like the outline of her father's. Nearer and nearer still; and now, gazing anxiously up, her eyes are met by those of a stranger. His eyes look straight into hers, and she looks down in dis-

appointment and with a nameless sensation of discomfort. The man she has seen is handsome; even in that short moment she observed that he had intensely dark hair, and eyes of an almost oppressive brilliancy. Then suddenly she sees that Captain Marion is just behind or beside this man, and she is vexed that any face should have come between her and her father's. She sees her sister and her husband, and a girl whom she assumes, of course, to be Miss Rowan. She is hurried up the ladder and on to the deck of the steamer, and her father catches her in his arms.

Meanwhile, Miss Melissa was not particularly anxious about the whole expedition. She was not greatly absorbed in longing to meet Sydney's father; she felt a little interest about the probable appearance of Sydney's sister, and still more about Miss Rowan. She allowed herself to be guided and helped and lifted on to the steamer's deck in a dreamy sort of mood, thinking about hardly anything except the discomfort of steamers in general and the annoyance of having friends who had relations coming from America. In the eagerness of all the others of her party, each hurrying forward to meet somebody or see somebody, little Melissa found herself almost isolated for a moment. Everyone appeared to have forgotten her—a condition of things which was new to her, and which, however short its lasting, was not at all agreeable. She hardly knew where she was going, when suddenly her feet caught in a rope. She staggered and floundered a little, and she might perhaps have fallen but for the promptness of a man who stepped forward just at the right time, and caught her and lifted her safely over the danger. In her odd little languid way she closed her eyes when she found herself slipping, and hardly opened them quite until she knew she was firmly and safely on her feet again. There was something strong, gentle, and fatherly in the touch of the hand which held her up, and she thought perhaps it was Sydney's father, and was inclined to make a pretty little filial sort of scene. But opening her eyes, she saw two intensely deep, brilliant eyes looking into hers, and saw that a very tall dark man was her supporter. She quailed under those strange eyes. She felt herself growing red and tremulous. She looked up to him again; their eyes met again. He must have seen that hers sank under his look.

But his face showed not the slightest gleam of interest in her.

He had not spoken a word as he was helping her out of her little difficulty; he appeared to take no more interest in her than he would have done in a fallen chair which he happened to lift up.

The moment she was safely on her feet he drew aside without bowing or uttering a word. Melissa tried to say something in the way of thanks, but she could not find speech; and it did not seem as if he was listening for her to speak. He had clearly not given a thought to her. When she was a child she had once taken hold of the handles of an electric battery, and she received a shock of pain that thrilled all through her: and she could not get her hands away, and she could not cry out. Melissa now recalled in a strange, sudden way that long-forgotten sensation, and seemed to feel it once again.

In a moment, however, she is in the centre of the group of greeting friends, and has to make several new acquaintances all at once. The man with the dark eyes is one of them. He is the only one of whose presence she is distinctly conscious. He is first introduced to her father, and then her father presents him to Melissa, and Melissa finds that he is the Mr. Montana, the remarkable fellow-passenger. He does not appear to remember or to know that he has just given her a helping hand. She can only stammer out a wretched unmeaning little word or two, and then somebody else is there. She scarcely knows one from another: she hardly even notices Miss Rowan.

Sydney Marion, too, goes through a series of bewildering experiences. She had hardly been released from the loving embrace of her father when her sister greeted her with a playful pull at her hair. Her brother-in-law gave her a kindly kiss, which would have been much less embarrassing if he had not hesitated, as if he did not quite know whether he ought to kiss her or not, and then she found herself making the acquaintance almost in a breath of her father's new friends, Miss Rowan and Mr. Montana.

Thought formed and reformed itself in a moment within her mind. 'She is very lovely; no, I don't think she is—she is too thin; she has no manner; no, she has too much manner; oh, yes, she is very charming. But what an extraordinary man! Is he very handsome, or is he very ugly? He looks like a prophet. He looks like Monte Cristo. Was he buried alive and dug up again?'

She found herself close to Melissa as they were all preparing to get on board the tender. Melissa looked shaken or affrighted or something of the kind; as if she had fallen and hurt herself, Sydney at first imagined.

'Has anything happened?' she asked in a low voice, and putting her arm round the girl.

'No, nothing,' Melissa answered distractedly. Then looking up, and with her old manner, she added, 'Oh, no; what could happen? I always told you nothing ever happens.'

CHAPTER IV.

A VEILED PROPHET.

Mr. Montana was to remain only one night in Mr. Aquitaine's house. He was to go on to London by the next morning's train. He had important work to do in London, he said, but he did not explain what it was. He only went so far as to say it was a business which now engrossed his life, and which he would submit to the world for the first time in London.

Mr. Aquitaine noticed that, as they drove from the steamer and passed through the streets of the town, Montana glanced around him inquiringly here and there, as if he were looking out for places he knew.

'You have been in this place before,' Mr. Aquitaine said. 'I can see that.'

'How do you know?' The question was put in a cold and cautious tone, and Montana drew himself back in the carriage.

'I see you are looking about inquiringly, as if you were looking out for some place you had known and couldn't find it. Nothing wonderful in that; we make changes very quickly here.'

'I have come from a country where changes are quicker,' Montana said. He spoke in a deep, clear voice, habitually monotonous, giving the impression of a total absence of interest in what was going on around. 'Yes; I was here long ago; when I was a boy. I hardly recollect it. I am not quite certain sometimes whether I did not only dream of it.'

There was not much time that day for the new-comers to see the place, or for either set of persons—those who came from across the sea, or those who welcomed them—to study each other's ways and peculiarities. It was somewhat late when they all reached Mr. Aquitaine's house, and nearly time to dress for dinner. Two or three friends only were invited to meet the new guests. Miss Rowan was seated next to a young man who, some one told her, was a barrister, and whose name was Fanshawe. He did not seem to her in the least like any species of lawyer. He looked very young, to begin with. He was a

strong young fellow, slender, but like an athlete in build; he had short curling fair hair, and an audacious yellow moustache; bright blue eyes, a complexion fair as a girl's, and a boyish laugh that spoke a genuine sense of enjoyment. He and she soon became friendly.

'Are you really a lawyer?' she asked him without hesitation.

'A sort of lawyer; yes; a barrister. I believe the two branches are all in one in your country; isn't that so?'

'My country? America is not my country.'

'No? I thought it was. I thought you were an American girl. You come from America.'

'So does Mrs. Trescoe. Do you call her an American girl?'

'Oh, but she has only been across for a few months or weeks or something. However, if you say you are not an American girl, Miss Rowan, I am sure I believe you. I hope you are not offended with me. I meant no harm: there are some charming American girls.'

'I should be very proud of being an American girl if I were one. I don't think there is a more enviable being in the world than an American girl; except one.'

'Yes; and who is that one?'

'An American boy, of course.'

'Oh, I say!' and Fanshawe laughed.

'But I am not an American girl,' Miss Rowan said. 'I am Irish; I have only been living in America.'

'Do you like America?'

'I love it. So you are really a lawyer?'

'Well, I shall be really a lawyer when the law-going public find out my merits and the solicitors send me briefs—which as yet they have unaccountably omitted to do, perhaps by reason of some vile conspiracy.'

'A lawyer! I should never have thought it,' Geraldine said meditatively.

'Why not?'

'Well, I thought lawyers were generally old and grizzled and grim, and that they wore spectacles.'

'When we are successful we come to that,' Fanshawe said gravely. 'That's what we look forward to.'

'Success is all like that, I really believe,' Geraldine said, with earnestness.

'Like what, Miss Rowan?'

'Like that. I am sure you understand. It comes too late to be enjoyed; or if it comes early it often goes too soon. It is

bought too dearly. I am sometimes sorry for men because they have to try to be successful. I am glad to be a woman for that reason: we have not to try for it. There is no success for us.'

'Except a brilliant match.'

'Yes; that is our laurel wreath, our one hope to make life worth enduring. Happily, we are soon put out of pain. The prize does not come with grey hair and spectacles. Our struggle is short. In America we give up at five-and-twenty.'

'But you are not five-and-twenty?'

'No; but why do you assume that I have given up?'

'I don't assume anything of the kind. You have only to go in and win.'

'Thank you; that was kindly said, but don't try any more like it. Let us not pay compliments.'

'Very well. You are going to London soon?'

'Yes; I am longing to go.'

'I am so glad you are going. I live there.'

'I am very glad you live there.'

'Thank you—especially as you banish compliments. Yes—I come from this town; but I live in London now. My father had a place here once, but he sold it. He got not to like it. My sister died here; and he didn't like the whole place any more.'

'I am not surprised,' said Miss Rowan softly. 'The place where one we loved has died, who could bear to see it always?'

'It was a sad story altogether,' Fanshawe said. 'They had quarrelled, don't you know—at least, you couldn't know, of course; but they had quarrelled—about a love-match my sister would make; and then my people would have made it up gladly, but—well, she died, and there was an end of it. Then my father couldn't stand the place any more, and so he gave it up.'

'Was this long ago?' Geraldine asked, hoping that it was long ago, so that the revival of its memory might be less of a pain to the young man.

'Yes: it was a good long time ago—fifteen or sixteen years. I was at school all the time in Germany, and didn't know very much about it until the end.'

Geraldine liked the young man's fresh and genial manner. There was something about him sympathetic. His talk was refreshing. For the rest, the dinner-party wanted brightness. Mr. Montana spoke little, and was apparently content that people should look at him and ask each other why he did not speak. If he spoke little, he ate and drank less. He made it evident

that he regarded the dinner as only a ceremonial for him. Mr. Aquitaine and Captain Marion talked a good deal; but Mr. Aquitaine often went into local affairs, and Captain Marion knew nothing about even the local affairs of the localities which ought to have been of personal concern to himself. Mrs. Trescoe was not near anyone she cared to talk to. Melissa remained resolutely silent; Mrs. Aquitaine hardly ever talked.

Geraldine rose early next morning. She was an early riser even for Mr. Aquitaine's habits. She had lived for some years lately in an American town or village where it was an article of faith that no one ought to be out of bed much after nine o'clock in the evening, or in bed after five in the morning. She had fallen into the ways of the country with a flexibility natural to her fresh and vigorous nature. She was a girl of quick and lively curiosity, and when she was at any new place was unresting until she had seen and learned all that was within her reach to know about it. This first morning, therefore, of her stay at Mr. Aquitaine's, she rose very early. She had heard the murmuring of water in her ears all the night through, and she was in hopes, not being quite clear as to the exact situation of her host's dwelling, that when she went to her window in the morning she might look upon the tossing sea. 'Sing oh!' she kept murmuring to herself now and then at wakeful moments of the night; 'let man learn liberty from crashing wind and lashing sea!' murmuring from the verses of a poet to whom English criticism has not yet done justice, and probably never will. When she woke in the morning and ran to her window, she saw not the sea, indeed, but a sight surely not less lovely —a bright broad river flowing in the faint light of a breezy spring dawn. Not even the sea itself has had the love of poets, and of all natures that like the poet's are for ever fresh and young, as the rivers have had. The mother may, as Burns sings, forget the child, and the monarch forget the crown that has only been an hour upon his head; but who ever forgets the river of his youth? As Geraldine looked out upon the stream below her window, the river of her youth came back upon her memory; and with the river the thought of those who were happy with her by the ripple of its waters; of the father who was father, and friend, and companion alike: and there were tears in her eyes.

She was soon out upon the breezy lawn. Preparations were being made for Mr. Montana's going. His train was starting at an early hour, and Mr. Aquitaine was to accompany him to

the station. No other of the family or guests was yet stirring. Geraldine saw Montana and Mr. Aquitaine on the lawn at a short distance from her. She was rather given to studying character, and of course, like most clever girls, fancied she had a distinct gift for the quick understanding of men and women. She had occupied herself a good deal in the voyage across the Atlantic in studying the characters of her companions, and she was of opinion that she had contrived to sound the depths of each nature except one. She was by no means clear about Mr. Montana. Sometimes he seemed to her merely vain and shallow; but at other times he impressed her with a certain sense of awe or dread, as if there were some hidden strength of dangerous will about him; and again in other moods he seemed to her only a self-deluded visionary. On the whole, she did not like him—a rare condition of feeling with her: for her first and natural impulse was to like people. Most of us are otherwise constructed by nature: our first instinctive impulse is to dislike any new-comer, even though he be only a wayfarer getting into a railway-carriage, where he has full as good a right to be as we have. If he turns out a good fellow or an agreeable person after, we may like him well enough; but we leave the burden of self-vindication to him. It is enough for us that he is getting into the carriage where we are already seated, and although there be ample room for him and us, our impulse is to dislike him all the same. Now, Miss Rowan's first impulse would have been to like him, and think that he ought to be made welcome.

She went up to Mr. Aquitaine at once and received his wondering congratulations upon her early rising.

'My daughter won't think of getting up these four or five hours yet. I am going to see Mr. Montana off by his train.'

'May I go too?' Geraldine asked, delighted at the prospect of the drive, and the railway-station, and the sights new to her.

She had no more hesitation about offering herself as Mr. Aquitaine's companion than if she had been tendering her companionship to Mr. Aquitaine's wife.

He looked for a moment a little surprised, but Geraldine did not notice his surprise, and he answered at once that he should be delighted to take her with him, and show her some of the towns as they passed along, and bring her back before most of the other people in the house had got out of bed.

Mr. Montana had remained silent all the time. He was looking on the river. He had not spoken a word to Geraldine.

'Strange,' he said suddenly, turning to Mr. Aquitaine, 'how

certain scenes impress one with the conviction that he must have seen them before. I don't suppose I ever could have been just here before; and yet the look of the river makes me feel as if I had known the place once. I seem to have been young here.'

'Oh, I felt exactly like that this morning,' Geraldine said in quick sympathy with him, for once, as she thought. 'When I looked out first and saw that lovely river flowing so fast, I felt as if I were living all my youth over again.'

'All her youth?' Mr. Aquitaine said with a smile. 'Is it then all gone?'

'It seems to me all gone,' Geraldine said, 'sometimes. It seemed so when I looked out this morning and saw the river.'

Mr. Aquitaine turned to her with kindly sympathising eyes. He thought he could understand her feelings.

Montana had not been following all this.

'Was there not,' he asked slowly of Aquitaine, 'a park, a sort of public park, here once? somewhere on the river—as if it were here? I must have seen something of the kind when a child somewhere. Perhaps it was some other river like this.'

'Why, to be sure we had a public park—a little park here on this very ground; but it is some years ago. Your feet are on what was its soil just now.'

Montana started and looked down at the ground as if he expected to see some of the soil strangely clinging to his feet and in some mysterious way bearing testimony against him.

Mr. Aquitaine was launched into a little local history of the growth of the town, the disproportionate size of the former park and the necessity of starting a new one, the important part he had himself borne in that work of improvement, and the strong opposition which had been got up, and the misconstruction to which the efforts of himself and others had been subjected by their enemies. Even the most liberal-minded residents of the greatest provincial town can seldom bring themselves to believe that local improvements and the local controversies that range around the march of their progress are not of world-wide interest, or at least capable of being made so when expounded by some qualified lecturer.

Geraldine listened with such intense interest and beaming eyes that after a while Mr. Aquitaine accepted her as his audience, and imparted all the knowledge to her. Mr. Montana was apparently not paying any attention. In an undefinable sort of way he always put himself, from the first, in the position of one

who is not bound to engage in any question which he does not feel to be part of his own special mission. He had deeper thoughts, and must not be distracted from them; at least, must not be expected to endure the distraction long. He assumed this privilege; and, as he assumed it, the people he met gave it to him without struggle or protest.

'Time is getting on,' Mr. Aquitaine suddenly said, looking at his watch; 'I have to give one or two directions; I'll come to you when it is time to go.'

He went towards the house and left Montana and Miss Rowan on the lawn by the river. Geraldine hardly ever knew what it was to feel shy or embarrassed in the presence of anyone. She had not self-consciousness or self-conceit enough to be shy or nervous. But she did always find a certain sense of embarrassment in the company of Mr. Montana whenever they chanced to be for a moment alone. He had sought her society a good deal on the voyage. He had walked with her on deck now and then, in the 'soft hours that fill the eyes and melt the heart,' or while the steely light of the stars was on the pallid tips of the waves, and the ruddy orange glow from the stern windows sent that gleam over the sea which Coleridge finely compared to the light of experience illumining only that which it leaves behind. He had never attempted anything like flirtation with her; his manner was not that of a man who cared to waste his time in flirting with women; but there was a grave familiarity about him which was, she thought, addressed more distinctly to her than to others, and which displeased her. It was a manner of authority, as of one who had known her long and had a right to direct her. It was not easy to explain what there was in it which seemed to imply a sort of special companionship, a common bond, a tie like that between master and pupil, guardian and ward; but something there was in Mr. Montana's manner to her from the first which impressed her with the idea of such an assumption. There was nothing to resent; nothing that she could clearly describe even to a sister, if she had one; but the impression was on her, and it made her feel a little constrained in Mr. Montana's company.

It might have seemed as if he were resolved to deepen the impression now: for the moment Mr. Aquitaine had gone, he struck at once into dialogue with Geraldine, to whom he had not addressed a word before.

'Who was the young man who sat next you at dinner last night, and talked to you a great deal?'

'He is a Mr. Fanshawe,' Geraldine answered. 'I think I shall go in, Mr. Montana.'

'Just a moment, and I will go with you. Do you know anything of Mr. Fanshawe?'

'Nothing; I am quite a stranger here; I never met any of the people before.'

'You seemed to be interested in him?'

'Yes; I was very much interested in him. He seemed very clever and bright, and he made himself very agreeable.'

'Do you know where he comes from?'

'He told me he lives in London; but that he belongs to this place. But, indeed, I know hardly anything about him. Mr. Aquitaine could tell you.'

'Shall we go in?' he said.

Geraldine turned her back to the river, and they walked slowly towards the house. Suddenly Mr. Montana stopped and said:

'We shall meet again in London, of course; but I want you before that to think over what I have said to you. You are bound to help us. We want you.'

'Why I more than another? What can I do for you—or for anything? I have no power——'

'You have power.'

'Have I? What is it?'

'You have the power of impressing men and women. If you had faith you would find it easy to fill others with the same faith. That is your calling in life. You cannot evade it. Mind, I tell you that. You will remember it afterwards. It is your calling; you cannot evade it.'

'But, Mr. Montana,' Geraldine said impatiently, 'do pray tell me the plain meaning of all this. Has it any meaning? I don't even know what your objects are. I don't know anything about them. Am I to have faith in projects before I even know what they are? What am I to have faith in?'

'You must have faith in me, to begin with. I have faith in you.'

Miss Rowan looked curiously at him. She was not afraid of his dark burning eyes. She looked steadily into his eyes, and she could find no meaning there—no faith, no purpose. They seemed shallow and cold, for all their brilliancy.

'I can't have faith in you until I know something more of you,' she said, with a directness which had nothing rude in it, so frankly and simply was her answer given as a mere statement

of fact. 'But even if I had all the faith in the world, what would be the good of that? I don't even know what mountain you want to move.'

'I have fixed on you,' he said slowly, 'from the first.'

'From what first, Mr. Montana? We met for the first time a fortnight ago; I hardly call it even an acquaintance.'

'Do you remember the "Ancient Mariner"? He says he knows at once the man that must hear him; "to him my tale I tell." Well, I know the woman who must hear me; to her my tale I tell.'

'But, Mr. Montana, you have not told me any tale,' Geraldine said, and then could have bitten her tongue for saying anything so unlucky. It seemed an invitation to him to go on and make her his confidante. Montana accepted it as such, evidently.

'You shall be told,' he answered. 'I don't ask you to say any more now. I shall enlist you in my cause; have no doubt of that. I want such help as yours, and I have a right to claim it.'

Mr. Aquitaine appeared at the door and beckoned to them.

'I shan't go, Mr. Aquitaine,' Geraldine said. 'I should only delay you; I have things to put on, and all that.'

'We have time enough, as far as that goes,' Mr. Aquitaine said. 'Do you think I didn't make allowance for the putting on of things? Have I not experience? Is there not Melissa? Go: run along and put your things on; we shall have time.'

'No, thanks; I think I have changed my mind. I should rather not go.'

'Really rather not? Really and truly?'

'Really and truly.'

'Well, I know ladies hate to be hurried.' Mr. Aquitaine perhaps on the whole was relieved to find that they had not to wait. 'Then, Mr. Montana, we'll get along. Ten minutes too early, you know, better than half a minute too late.'

They went away. Montana shook hands with Geraldine, but did not say a word. He seemed to have made up his mind that she should be impressed with the difference of his manner to her when they were alone, and when any other was present. It did impress her—uncomfortably. She felt like one who is being quietly, gradually entangled in some conspiracy. Montana had already got so far as to draw from her a seeming acknowledgment of her willingness to accept his confidence; and yet it would have been ridiculous, even if it were possible, for her at that moment to enter any sort of protest against such an assumption. She walked slowly to the edge of the river again,

feeling strangely dissatisfied with herself. The stream lost for the moment all its charm.

Geraldine was not the only very early riser among the women of the house that morning. Melissa Aquitaine had passed an uneasy night, alternating between long stretches of sleeplessness and dreams that were more unrefreshing and disquieting than even lack of sleep. She knew that Mr. Montana was leaving the house early, and she got out of bed with the dawn, and wrapping herself in masses of covering, sat at her window. It looked upon the lawn. She had not sat there long when she saw Montana and Geraldine walking together slowly, and side by side, towards the house. They seemed deep in confidential talk. She saw them stop suddenly, as if there was some confidence they had yet to exchange before they passed indoors. Then they disappeared from her sight. She could not see from her window that her father was now on the threshold speaking with them. All she saw was that Montana and Geraldine were at that immature hour walking together side by side in seemingly confidential talk. Then, after a moment or two had passed away, she saw Geraldine come out alone, and slowly cross the lawn with the manner of one who is depressed. It would have suited well enough with the manner of a girl whose lover has just parted from her. A pang went through Melissa's heart. She hated Geraldine from that moment. She was possessed by such a vehemence of anger and bitterness of spirit that she allowed some of her wrappings to fall off her shoulders unheeded. She did not even mind the cold at such a moment; she did not care even though she was uncomfortable.

CHAPTER V.

GERALDINE.

Many a sentimental and enamoured youth, who happened to be in converse with Miss Rowan, was struck to the heart with the deep, peculiar, dreamy gaze of her soft brown eyes. There were moments when they looked on him, through him, into his very soul; and yet their meaning seemed far away, rapt from earthly things. Her soul, he sometimes thought despondently, was with the stars, and not with earth and him. He could not doubt that the eyes turned kindly towards him, and rested on his eyes with unutterable softness; and still there seemed something distant, withdrawn, suppressed, in Miss Rowan's ex-

pression. Sometimes the enamoured youth became filled with a faint hope that he was making an impression which Miss Rowan did not wish wholly to resist, and yet would not acknowledge even to herself. Even from across a table sometimes a man found those eyes resting on him quietly, softly, giving no response to his own, like the eyes of one who, waking, but hardly conscious, dreamed of him.

The explanation is simple, and not poetic. Miss Rowan was short-sighted. When she particularly wanted to see some distant object clearly, she put up her double eye-glass as unaffectedly as if she had been born and bred in Boston, Massachusetts; but when she did not particularly want to study the object, it often happened that her eyes seemed to rest where her mind certainly was not; and she did not know that other eyes were looking into hers. Thus it happened that some persons gave her credit for a poetic dreaminess in which she did not indulge; and many women accused her of being a frank coquette, and making audacious work of her eyes.

The presence of Miss Geraldine Rowan always set people talking about her. She was not by any means an astonishingly beautiful young woman. But she had a very charming face, with brown hair and deep Celtic eyes. She was quick and graceful in all her movements. She had seen different kinds of life; had had some suffering and some happiness, and had learned the art of extracting such enjoyment as might be out of any slight and chance material that was flung in her way. Her Irish birth had given her vivacity and animal spirits, along with that suffusion of the poetic which seems the inheritance of the Celtic race everywhere; and her American life had taught her the ways of a freedom which in the old world is not the endowment of an unmarried woman. She was decidedly a clever girl; but if she ever seemed anything of a prodigy, it could only be for the simple reason that she could do many different things well, even if she did nothing surpassingly well. She could sing; she could play the piano and the harp—the almost forgotten harp, once the pride of every true heroine, now associated in the minds of most Londoners, at all events, with green baize and the outside of a public-house. She could ride, drive, swim, and skate, as well as dance. She was not afraid of anything. She was fond of reading, and spoke two or three modern languages very well. Each of these accomplishments is in itself commonplace enough; even a combination of several of them would not go far towards making a feminine Crichton. But combine them all, and a

few others, in the person of a graceful girl with a generous heart and a fresh, vivid nature, and it is easy to understand why young women and elderly gentlemen, as well as young men, should have agreed to exaggerate her gifts and graces into those of a paragon. Her kindly heart and sunny temper did a good deal to make people tolerant of her cleverness. She had not the least taint of the coquette in her nature. She looked straight into the eyes of everyone with whom she spoke, and spoke out so frankly and directly whatever she wished to say, that it seemed hardly possible to venture on paying her any of the stereotyped compliments of society. Nature might have made her to be a special blessing to shy young men, or reserved and taciturn elders. He of either sort who most dreaded to be thrown upon the tender mercies of a girl, felt not the least embarrassment in the company of Miss Rowan. Even if he were actually left alone with her, he felt no fear about breaking down and finding that he had nothing to say. She was sure to find enough to say, and to draw him out on some subject which specially interested him. Shy Mr. Trescoe found himself, after a while, chatting freely with Geraldine Rowan. He even found himself starting a conversation with her, and asking her questions quite of his own motion. Once he was heard, in the face of a breakfast-room full of company, to invite her to take a turn with him in the garden. His wife was intensely amused, and complimented Geraldine on the success which she had accomplished in making Mr. Trescoe talk to a girl without blushing.

The company were at luncheon, and were talking of the departed guest.

'I do like him so much—so much,' Mrs. Aquitaine said, in her languid way and her imperfect English. 'He is so beautiful; the most beautiful man I have seen in all England. He is like a picture of the night with his great eyes.'

'Splendid fellow—I know it,' Captain Marion said. 'I talked a great deal with him all the way across, and he let me see most of his plans. He inspires me with confidence.'

'I couldn't understand his plans, all the same,' Mr. Trescoe ventured to interpose.

'Dear Frank,' his wife observed, 'there is nothing very surprising in that. Who expected you to understand them? You don't go in much for understanding things, do you, dear?'

'Well, I don't know,' Trescoe answered in perfect good-humour; 'I don't set up to be very clever, Kitty, that's true enough; but I can see just as far into a millstone as my neigh-

bour, I fancy, and I know I couldn't make out what Montana was explaining to your papa all the way over. In fact, I don't think he was explaining anything; I think he was only dodging, don't you know,' he said, addressing himself to Mr. Aquitaine; 'trying to seem as if he was explaining things, do you see, and not explaining them, all the same. So he struck me——'

'Struck you?' said Katherine, 'struck my husband! But didn't you hit him again, Frank? I would if I were you.'

Katherine's mild joke made them laugh; but it did not succeed, as she had perhaps hoped it would, in turning the conversation away from Montana.

'Nonsense—he is full of frankness,' Captain Marion said. 'I thought he seemed only anxious to find people with sympathy to listen to him.'

'Then you understand what he is going to do in Europe?' Mr. Aquitaine asked.

'Yes, certainly; that is, I understand his general objects. I know what he would wish to do, if he could.'

'Well, what does he wish to do?'

'He wants to arouse the sympathies of people here in a great scheme for the good of humanity. Of course he didn't fully go into the details of his scheme, but he will explain all that in London. He does not want it to get about before he has an opportunity of explaining it fully himself. He thinks premature and imperfect criticism would have a prejudicial effect; and of course it would. We all know that.'

'Then you really don't know anything about his plans?'

'About his actual plans, no; but about his purposes I do. His purposes seem to be entirely noble.'

'I think Frank wasn't so far wrong, after all,' Mr. Aquitaine quietly observed.

'I am so glad to hear it,' Katherine said. 'Frank is so far wrong generally.'

'Come now, I wasn't so far wrong once, at all events,' the unruffled Frank observed.

'When was that, dear?' his wife asked with affected simplicity.

'When I asked you to marry me, Kitty.'

'It was I was out of it there,' said Kitty.

'But about this Montana,' Aquitaine returned to the subject. —'I don't like him somehow. He seems all too theatric. He is like a play-actor; he is acting always. His manner, his looks, his gestures, everything about him—acting, acting all.'

'I don't think he is acting,' Geraldine said emphatically, and speaking for the first time.

'Nor I,' said Mr. Fanshawe.

Melissa had not opened her mouth on the subject. It was rare for that usually irrepressible little talker not to have a word to say on any question, whether she knew anything about it or not. But she had remained silent, looking up now and then from speaker to speaker, and then dropping her eyes at once. She now glanced eagerly at Miss Rowan, and her dark complexion glowed with scarcely suppressed anger, as Geraldine seemed to be coming out in defence of Mr. Montana. But her eyes flashed gratitude on Fanshawe, although he was apparently following Geraldine's lead.

'I don't believe he is acting,' Miss Rowan went on. 'I believe the man is self-deceived as well as deceiving. But I believe he is deceiving all the same; I think he is in love with his own ideas, or schemes, or whatever they are. I think he is in love with himself.'

'If I were he, I think I should rather have been in love with Miss Rowan,' Melissa said, looking saucily up with a suggestion of venom on her tremulous lips. 'He might have had opportunity enough on the voyage, one would think, and since, perhaps.'

'Mel, my little girl, you give your tongue too much licence,' her father said quietly.

'Little girls ought to be seen and not heard, I suppose,' his unabashed daughter replied. 'Thank you, papa; I intend to be seen as well as heard, I can assure you, and to see, too. One can see a good deal if one gets up early.'

Geraldine only smiled good-humouredly.

'He had opportunity enough,' she said; 'but I can assure you he was not in love with me or any other girl; he was all-absorbed in himself. He would hardly have been much in love with me, for I could not hide my distrust of him. I think I disliked him instinctively.'

Melissa smiled scornfully. She did not believe Geraldine.

'But those instinctive dislikes,' Miss Marion said—she, too, had been silent thus far—'are they reasonable, Miss Rowan? Are they not too feminine, don't you think? Are they not what men say all women are given to—likes or dislikes that we can't explain? I should have thought you would not encourage such feelings. It hardly seems quite Christian-like, does it?'

'It doesn't,' Geraldine admitted. 'I am afraid I am a very bad Christian sometimes. I admit it is downright feminine,

womanish, foolish, anything you like; but still I do feel it. And then, may there not be some warning sometimes in those undefined antipathies? We don't know quite all of nature's secrets yet, do we? But I won't try to excuse myself by inventing mysterious natural laws; I'll take all the blame of my antipathies. I can't help distrusting Mr. Montana; I don't like him.'

'I don't like him,' Fanshawe said earnestly. 'I agree with every word Miss Rowan says.'

Sydney Marion looked up sadly, but not surprised, of course; she knew how it would be. He was already becoming the bond-slave of Geraldine Rowan.

'I don't think he is acting,' Fanshawe continued volubly; 'at least, I don't think he is all acting. I dare say he is half fanatic, half impostor. I dare say he believes in himself; a fellow may succeed in deceiving himself more thoroughly than he deceives anyone else.'

'You young men are dreadful,' Katherine said. 'You are all the same, just the same. It is enough to hear two or three women say that any man is handsome, and all hate him from that moment. Talk of the jealousy of women! It's nothing to the jealousy of men—young men, I mean,' she added, suddenly remembering that Captain Marion admitted all the merits of Mr. Montana.

'I don't think women are jealous of each other at all,' Sydney Marion said, in a tone of gentle and almost regretful conviction.

'Not a bit,' Katherine affirmed; 'why should they be? As long as another woman doesn't come in one's way, I am sure we don't care how handsome she is, or how much she is admired.'

'I am not jealous of handsome women,' Melissa said, 'but I hate them all.'

She delivered this gentle sentiment with her eyes fixed on Miss Rowan.

'Fie, then, my Melissa,' Mrs. Aquitaine gently interposed; 'I am sure you do not hate Miss Rowan.'

'I didn't say I hated Miss Rowan,' Melissa replied demurely.

It was not well to try to put this young lady in the right. She was like a child whom it is unwise to tempt with any questions, as something embarrassing to the general company is likely to be the result. Melissa sadly embarrassed and annoyed most of the listeners. Geraldine did not in the slightest degree mind the saucy little maiden's attack, and only rushed to the

relief of the general company, and especially of Melissa herself, fearing lest Mr. Aquitaine might feel himself called upon to administer some public and futile rebuke to his unmanageable daughter.

'Still, a man may be too handsome,' she said. 'Mr. Montana seems to me much too handsome. He is naturally absorbed in admiring himself and seeing what an impression he makes. I don't believe a man could be a hero who was so handsome as that. It is not the business of a man to be handsome. Perhaps it is only because of that idea that I have felt a sort of distrust of Mr. Montana; I don't know any real reason for not liking him, and Miss Marion is right. One ought not to speak as if a mere feeling of one's own were a reason. I ought not to have said anything against Mr. Montana. May I withdraw it all? Is it too late?'

'Much too late,' said Fanshawe. 'I stand by it all.'

Mr. Montana had not been four-and-twenty hours in Mr. Aquitaine's house, and he had already succeeded in converting all the inmates of the building, permanent and temporary, into divided camps. An atmosphere of something like discomfort was making itself felt. All the women admired Montana except Geraldine alone, and Mrs. Trescoe hated her for not admiring him; while Melissa, who would have hated her if she had praised him, hated her now for pretending or daring to dispraise him. Sydney Marion was sorry for Geraldine's evident yielding to mere prejudice and feminine instincts. She too admired Montana; but her mind was distracted from entire absorption in that controversy by her sad misgivings on the subject of young Fanshawe's evident admiration for Miss Rowan. Geraldine was doubly an offender. All the men in the place admired her, and she would not admire the one man whom all the women agreed in admiring. Mr. Aquitaine was distressed by the ways of his daughter. Not merely did she persist in showing an open dislike to Miss Rowan, but she seemed unhappy on her own account as well. She crept into corners and remained silent there as long as she could, and even when drawn out of her retreats she did not enter with any spirit into conversation or amusement that was going on. Katherine was restless and fretful; now full of high spirits, and now out of humour and disposed to quarrel. Mrs. Aquitaine remained just as usual; almost absolutely without interest in anything that was going on.

Geraldine's high spirits and unfailing temper stood her now

in good stead. She knew the kindly purpose of Mr. Aquitaine and his wife, and did not mind in the least Melissa's little outbursts of anger. That is to say, she did not feel angry with the spoiled child; but, on the contrary, she made up her mind to go roundly to work and make a friend of the girl. In any case, she considered herself as the guest of her father's dear old friend Captain Marion, and held it her first duty to take care that, so far as she was concerned, nothing should occur to make him feel uncomfortable. So she set herself to work to amuse the company as well as she might, and to charm them out of the curious English way which objects to being amused. She sang and played whenever anybody asked her; she suggested all manner of ways of passing the time; she talked to Mrs. Aquitaine just as long as the languid lady seemed to be amused by the talk, and stopped off at the right time. She asked a great many questions of Mr. Aquitaine, and gave full satisfaction to his desire for imparting information. He thought her not so practical a girl as Sydney Marion, but very much more interesting. He drove her out early in the morning once or twice, before most of the other guests had thought of getting up, and found he had a very delightful time of it. Geraldine had acquired all the free and fearless ways of the American girl, although she was not American either by birth or family, and she thought no more of going out in the morning with Mr. Aquitaine than she would of going out with Captain Marion, or with her own father if he were living. But it is to be feared that the other ladies did not altogether admire her behaviour in this respect. They could not say that she was bold; even Katherine could not say so much as that. But they thought she might have remained in bed in the mornings until the other ladies found it convenient to get up.

Geraldine went her way all unconscious of the talk she was creating. As for Captain Marion, her manner to him was so affectionate that even languid Mrs. Aquitaine sometimes smiled with a half-knowing look at Sydney. Captain Marion was acknowledged by everyone to be a delightful companion. He had narrowly missed being a man of talent—a certain want of force of character or of concentration had caused him to fall short of a genuine success in everything he did and everything he attempted. He had been admired in the army, but had had no chance of distinguishing himself particularly. He was a clever amateur artist; some of his smaller water-colours had been in the Academy. He could play the violin, and was a

good musician in general. He loved books, and was a connoisseur in bindings. He was a student of science in an easy way, and could do a little etching. He was young in appearance and in manner; younger still in heart. His talk was bright and even joyous, with just enough of sympathetic tenderness to give the idea of a certain depth of character which, perhaps, when one came to explore, was not found to exist. He was still a man with whom it was at least possible to imagine a young woman falling in love—even so charming a young woman as Geraldine Rowan. 'Eh, Sydney, my dear, I think you will have a young mamma-in-law—I mean a step-mamma, one of these days,' Mrs. Aquitaine said to Miss Marion.

CHAPTER VI.

THE XANADU OF THE FUTURE.

THERE was a great assembly in a large London hall about a month after the landing of Captain Marion and his companions in the northern seaport. The hall was crowded; all the more so, because the manner of getting the company together had been peculiar. There was no buying of tickets, or payment of money at the doors. The company assembled by invitation. Each person had a card printed specially, and bearing his or her own name; not a name written in and filling up a space left blank for the purpose, but a separate name engraved on each card—one card specially printed for each person. Each card also contained the announcement that no other invitations whatever would be issued, nor would any notice be taken of any request, public or private, for additional admissions. The invited company included representatives of every rank, profession, and occupation. The peerage, the House of Commons, the world of fashion, the Church in all its denominations, the bench, the bar, the army, science, literature, art—all were addressed through some eminent name. The manner of distribution was perplexingly odd. Sometimes a wife was invited, and not her husband. Sometimes, out of a stately and noble household, only a girl of twenty years was asked to favour the meeting with her presence; it could only be assumed that she had, at one time or another, expressed some faith or hope not common to her family, and which showed her to be in communion with the higher aspirations of humanity. Representative working men of all trades

and shades of opinion found themselves bidden to this remarkable gathering; and, when they got there, were amazed to see themselves planted next to some great statesman or brilliant leader of fashion. The leaders of fashion were caught readily enough by the peculiarities of the whole affair. The London season so far had been rather dull and lustreless. No Oriental sovereign of any colour was in town just then. No sensation of any kind had stirred the languid atmosphere until Montana made his appearance. His happy inspiration as to the form of invitation was a complete success. At first people wondered; then laughed; then thought they did not care to go; then found that others were going, and that others again were dying to go and could not get invitations; and thereupon, of course, all those who had invitations became determined to use the privilege. No cause, however great or good, could have had, to start with, anything like the impulse which was given to Montana's mission by his specially devised plan of invitation. He had managed the whole affair so cleverly, had contrived so ingeniously to transfix with his invitations some of the leading persons in every class, profession, and movement, that not to have received one of his cards was a proof that the unfavoured creature was nobody, even in his own sphere. It is much to be feared that some white lies came from pretty lips concerning those invitations, and that ladies described themselves as having been invited, but resolved not to go, to whose door no messenger had brought Montana's card.

The name of Montana was not the least of the peculiarities which contributed to his sudden success. He had got at the name in a very simple way. He had made the beginning of his career in the territory of Montana, in the United States; and, wanting a name, he had adopted for himself the name of the region in which he made a beginning. But had he had a special inspiration on the subject, he could not have done a better thing for his London success than to call himself Montana. It struck the attention at once. It did the part of a flourish of trumpets. When 'Mr. Montana' was announced, the company must look up in some expectancy and curiosity. Not one in every thousand of ordinary London people knew that there was a place in the United States called Montana. Most persons, therefore, assumed that there was something Italian, or Spanish, or romantic somehow, in such a name. Even if the bearer of the name had proved to be a short, stout, and commonplace man, with reddish whiskers and redder cheeks, it would still have counted for

something that he had such a remarkable name. But when the proclamation of Mr. Montana's name in a London crowd was followed by the apparition of Mr. Montana himself, the effect was something almost startling. Montana was singularly handsome. He wore no beard or moustache; and yet—rare thing with shaven men of dark complexion—his chin and upper-lip showed none whatever of that blue-black, gunpowder-stained, tattooed appearance which suggests that the razor is always wanting. He looked over the heads of ordinary men, and of all women. His pale, melancholy face, and his deeply brilliant eyes, seemed to look only into vacancy. He was habitually silent. He hardly ever spoke until he was spoken to; he would stand in a crowded drawing-room or sit at a dinner-table for any length of time without uttering a word, and yet he had not in the slightest degree the manner of a shy or even a reserved man. He seemed wrapped up in the quietness of an absolute self-reliance and independence. But when spoken to, even on the most commonplace subject, he had a way of suddenly turning the light of his oppressively bright eyes on the person who addressed him in a way that seemed to ask, 'Why talk commonplace to me? You and I are made for better discourse.' His mere way of saying the four little words, 'Do *you* think so?' made many a susceptible woman think the time had come for her to review her course of life, and test its real worth. 'Do *you* think so,' the words seemed to imply; 'you, who, although I never saw you before, I know to be capable of loftier thoughts, of utterances that roll from soul to soul?' An audacious stripling from the House of Commons, strong on facts and figures, once at dinner boldly encountered, or, as he put it, 'tackled,' Montana on some opinion the latter had been expressing with regard to the future place of the United States among the nations. The youth of promise positively affirmed afterwards, and will maintain to his dying day, that Montana knew absolutely nothing about the subject on which he was laying down the law; that his dates, his statistics, his views as to all manner of facts, only showed the most utter ignorance. He was, as he firmly believes, literally overwhelming Montana with confutation; he hoped to expose Montana then and there; he still insists that Montana had not one word to say in reply. Certain it is that Montana did not say one word in reply. But in the midst of the young law-maker's argument his face was lighted by a smile so sweet, so kindly, so pitying, so apparently irrepressible, that the whole company became ashamed of their friend, and felt that he must

be making himself outrageously ridiculous. Montana's smile appeared to be playing on his lips in spite of himself. It said in the most expressive manner: 'I will not laugh; I will not. I must try to seem respectful. He is such an earnest little blockhead; but, good heavens! what a blockhead he is!' The host said something meant to be soothing to his poor young friend, and broke up the conversation. They joined the ladies. Not a word more was said publicly on the subject; but men whispered to each other that really young Symington had too much chatter, and was becoming insufferable, and they were very glad that Montana had put him down. Some of the listeners always remained convinced that Montana had somehow or other crushed him with argument, and that Symington had shown himself shockingly ignorant. Mr. Symington fumed and chafed in vain. The pitying smile had settled him in all men's eyes.

Montana spoke to him kindly afterwards when he was leaving the drawing-room. 'I will tell you all about that,' he said, 'some other time. It is a complicated subject, but you can be made to understand it. I like your earnestness; it is a good sign. The man who wants to learn will learn, be the difficulties what they may.'

Symington's brain seemed to reel. He positively lost his coolness and his power of speech. He was literally shut up.

Our friends, or most of them, attended the great meeting. Captain Marion had settled in London for the time, in order to show Miss Rowan everything, and to give his daughter Sydney a long-postponed holiday. Mr. Aquitaine had brought Melissa up in order that she, too, might have her share of the holiday He did not propose to make any stay himself; he would rush up and down after his usual fashion, leaving Melissa meanwhile in care of his friends. The whole party were in seats not far from the platform on which the orator was to take his stand. Melissa was biting her lips to keep down her impatience. She was longing for Montana to make his appearance. He had never spoken more than a few of the most formal words to her; had probably not bestowed a single thought on her, and she could think of nothing but him. Since the first moment when she saw him he had taken a strange possession of her soul, and the poor little girl could not relieve her mind by breathing one word of confidence to any human creature. Miss Rowan's fine face, graceful figure, and animated movements attracted much attention. People set her down as foreign until she put up her double eye-glass, and then they pronounced her American. 'If

I had such eyes,' one lady remarked, 'I would rather never see anything than hide them under those horrid glasses.' Captain Marion attracted some attention, partly because of his bright smile and his good figure, but partly, too, because he would persist in displaying himself in a velvet coat, which he loved to wear when lounging and working at home.

Montana came on the platform, and everyone else was forgotten. The severe outlines of his evening dress made him look even taller and more slender than he really was. He hardly acknowledged the murmur of applause, but at once began to speak. He spoke in a low, sweet, measured tone. His accent was somewhat peculiar. It could not be called foreign, but it was not of London. Most people in the hall assumed that it must be American. Miss Marion whispered as much to Miss Rowan, but Miss Rowan shook her head, and said it was not American.

'Irish, perhaps,' Miss Marion suggested.

Miss Rowan smiled, and said there was nothing of the Irishman about Mr. Montana, she was glad to think.

'How unjust she is!' Miss Marion sadly thought. 'She hates him. Strange that so noble-minded a girl should be so prejudiced.'

'Our friend is a north-country man,' Mr. Aquitaine said quietly to Captain Marion; 'Lancashire or Yorkshire, clearly; I didn't notice it in talking with him; but it comes out now.'

Montana spoke with deep feeling apparently, and with a kind of eloquence. He sometimes warmed into a glowing thought; sometimes even condescended to some quaint piece of humorous illustration. He held his audience from first to last. The whole discourse was entirely out of the common. It had nothing to do with the ordinary gabble of the platform. It had no conventional eloquence about it. There was no studied antithesis; the listener could not anticipate in the middle of a sentence the stock form of rhetoric with which it was to close. The wonderful eyes seemed to be everywhere. If by chance any of the audience became for a moment inattentive, he or she suddenly seemed to feel an uncomfortable sensation, and looking up found that Montana's eyes were fixed on the disloyal listener. A curious thing was, that almost everyone in the room seemed to feel the direct appeal of Montana's eyes.

The speech was an explanation of Mr. Montana's mission. Of course he had more than one mission. His life was understood to be devoted to missions of one kind or another. But the special

object of his visit to Europe just now, was to found a great colony in the United States, where men and women might seek and find the perfect life. The colony was to be made up of as many different nationalities as Mr. Montana could contrive to inspire with his own reforming energy and faith. From the marriages contracted within the limits of the new colony were to spring the future governing race, by whom the good life of earth's children was to be made perfect. The Englishman was to bring his solid energy and his all-conquering patience; Ireland was to give her poetic fancy and the purity of her nature; the Italian would contribute his artistic genius; the Scot his indomitable strength of will; the German his vast capacity for the acquirement of knowledge; the Frenchman his lively genius and brisk spirit of recuperation. America, of course, opening her bosom to these seekers after perfection, would contribute her ample share to the work of colonisation. The colony would be self-governing; it would be founded on principles opposed to the base and worldly selfishness that had made property exclusive. It was to have its foundation deep down among the heroic virtues. Other communities had lived by appealing to man's least noble qualities; now, at last, a practical appeal should be made to the better angel that dwelt within him. The war spirit could not thrive among a community which enclosed in loving bonds the representatives of so many races hitherto hostile. Temperance, self-abnegation, and the family virtues were to be the inspiration of this new enterprise. Other projects of the same kind had tried to supplant the family virtues by socialistic innovations and extravagances, and had perished of their own pride and their own sins. The New Atlantis was to be a community on which all good men and women must smile benignant approval. Around that purified and almost sacred commonwealth would grow up in time a great race of heroic, self-denying, happy men and women, governing their lives on the laws of morals, and on the laws of physical health, those embodied illustrations of the moral law. Thus, with the ages, the hopes and energies of the race would centre in the New World, which had this still newer world, an empire within an empire, enclosed within its vast domain. There would be room enough through many ages for America to take in the pilgrims and refugees of all parts of the ancient earth; and Montana saw with poetic or prophetic eye, a time in the dim future when Europe and Asia should be only the great holiday-grounds, the vast museums and art-galleries, covered and

uncovered, amid which the colonists of the new settlements might seek temporary recreation, might study the half-forgotten arts of an aged time, and coming here and there on the ruins of a prison, the wreck of a fortress, might 'wonder what old world such things could see.'

All that was wanted for the beginning was land, money, and colonists. Mr. Montana announced that the land could be got easily enough; got for the asking from the generous American Government. Money was largely needed. Mr. Montana explained that this new colony was to be no ramshackle concern of log huts and shanties, and uncouth makeshift ways. The New Atlantis was to begin as it proposed to go on, in dignity and stateliness. It was an enterprise, Montana emphatically declared, of a thousand-fold more importance to the world and to history than the founding of Rome; and it should begin in form not unworthy its glorious destiny. The city was to have gates of bronze, columns of granite, marble halls of science and art, cathedrals rivalling in majestic beauty and devotional suggestiveness the most venerable piles of the ancient world. Every architecture was to be represented there, and who could doubt that, as time rolled on, the commonwealth would develop an architecture of its own, the compound of the world's ideas informed by the new spirit, and destined to be the last word of the architecture of the human race? The sanitary laws were to govern all the conditions of the city. The streets were to be broad indeed, but not straight and monotonous. On the contrary, the greatest diversity of size and structure was to relieve the eyes and delight the senses everywhere. Two rivers watered the base of the gentle hill on which this city of the future was to stand. The bridges over those streams alone would be like the embodied dream of a poet. To look to heaven from such a bridge and to see the stars reflected in the water below, or the sunbeams glancing on its ripples, would lift up the soul of the gazer almost as much as to bend in the cathedral and hear the organ peal forth its anthem of piety and praise. In the purified atmosphere ignoble thoughts could no more live than man's gross lungs can breathe the upper ether.

Most of the eyes that met Montana's, as he expounded his plans, were turned up with interest, admiration, and a certain amount of awe. But it must be owned that a good many pairs of sceptical or scornful eyes looked up from above moustaches and beards, and glanced through scholarly or professional spectacles. The men on the whole were not so much taken as the

ladies. Most of the younger men admitted that he was 'awfully clever,' but some thought him a decided humbug; some opined that he really didn't know himself what he was talking about. Some denied that he was at all handsome or even good-looking; and by the very energy of their protests bore testimony to the effect his personal appearance must have produced. Most of the elders held the scheme to be wholly impracticable, and whispered that the moment you came to look into the thing and get the facts and figures of it, everybody would see it could not come to anything. These were the worldlings, however, the mere practical narrow-minded men of economics and statistics; and Montana had in his speech already taken order with them by expressly announcing, in tone of melancholy contempt, that wherever he went, the narrow-minded and practical, the wise in their own conceit, were sure to be against him. He carried with him three classes of persons almost entirely: the earnest men and women who had views of life; the merely emotional, with whom a striking face and a strange manner are impressive; and the idle, at least among women, who were glad to be stirred by a new sensation on any terms. Many a woman's heart beat with strange pulsation as she gazed into that dark bloodless face, and fancied those eyes were turned on her.

'And now,' said Montana, drawing a deep breath and flooding the audience with the light of his eyes, 'we want money for this great work. I have come to Europe for help; and I will go from one end of Europe to the other in quest of it. Let anyone who hears me and wishes to give, give as may seem proportioned to his means. Let the wealthy give of their wealth, but in Heaven's name let me have the working-man's penny and the sempstress's half-penny. One thing you are to know: I will have no unwilling gifts. Before I have done with Europe I shall be loaded with money—let no one presume to encumber me with his gift who doubts my enterprise. I will give no acknowledgment or receipt of any kind; I will take no gift which has a name appended to it. If any lady or gentleman thinks of sending a contribution in his own name, or her own name, it is useless. I will send all such offerings instantly back. There is nothing to be gained personally by contributing to my enterprise, no, not even a line of acknowledgment in a newspaper; not the poor credit of being anywhere mentioned or known as a donor. At each of the principal entrances of this hall there is an urn covered by a cloth. Let each who pleases raise the cloth in passing, and deposit any offering he feels called

upon to make. Then let him cover the gift so that none can see it, and go his way. I entreat of him, if he does not give with his whole heart and soul, to keep his money; not to stain our noble enterprise with the soil of his unwilling gift. Whether the money is found here or elsewhere is all the same to me and to the cause. It will come; I only ask that it may come with a will.'

The effect of this appeal was instantaneous. Almost everybody gave. Some white-haired old gentlemen took out their purses, carefully ascertained that they kept back enough to pay for a cab home, and threw the remainder of the contents into the urn. Some ladies, not a few, simply dropped their purses in, and hurried on. As Melissa Aquitaine came to one of the urns, she drew purposely behind her party. She had not a purse—hardly ever carried such an article about her. She glanced confusedly and timidly around to see if anyone was looking, and then stripped off her bracelets, her rings, her brooch, her watch and chain, and dropped them in, a glittering clinking heap into the urn. Her action was not unseen. A lady coming up had noticed it; she, too, threw her bracelets, bangles, and chains into the urn. Some men stole their contribution into the place of deposit as if they were ashamed of showing any faith in the business, and yet could not help giving to it.

Miss Marion and Miss Rowan came on together. Sydney took out her little purse, and found she had only a very few shillings.

'Will you lend me some?' she said timidly to Miss Rowan, who had seen her action, and was looking at her with a sort of amused pity.

'No, indeed I won't,' Miss Rowan said decidedly, 'not for that thing. I'll not help you to set such folly going. But listen,' she said, suddenly changing her tone, 'did not Mr. Montana say that the gifts of the unbelieving would only bring discredit on the cause—a curse and not a blessing; didn't he?'

'He did, I think,' Miss Marion answered faintly.

'Very well; then in that hope I make myself one of his contributors; and I give with a good will.'

She tossed her purse contemptuously into the urn.

They came against Mrs. Fanshawe.

'We are going in to see him,' Katherine said with sparkling eyes; 'I sent Frank to tell him, and Frank says he will see us—in the reception-room, you know. He is seeing some people there; women mostly; howling swells, I suppose; duchesses and all that; but he'll see us. Isn't that sweet of him? Isn't

he delightful? Doesn't he make one feel so good, and pure and noble, and all that sort of thing? Doesn't he? The world all seems so poor and unreal. I have given something—haven't you? —and I am going to send him some more. Won't you send him some more? But not in our own names; he wouldn't have that. Oh! it's all glorious, I think.'

Young Mr. Fanshawe came up.

'I think it's all a confounded imposture,' he said, without waiting for anyone to solicit his opinion. 'He's a clever fellow enough, but he's a humbug. Don't you think so, Miss Rowan?'

Already, poor Sydney Marion thought, he has learned to appeal only to her.

'I don't believe in him,' Geraldine said, with her accustomed energy; 'I don't believe anything good will come of him or his enterprise; there is something unholy about him. I feel as if we had been assisting at a witch's sabbath.'

The reception-room was crowded where Montana was receiving his friends. He spoke a hasty word or two to each person, who came up to him in turn, and quietly passed them on. There were no formal presentations. Everyone whom Montana did not know, either introduced himself or was taken for granted.

'What may I do to help your cause?' an earnest lady said, with a glitter of a tear in her eyes.

'Believe,' said Montana, gently pressing her hand.

She went on satisfied. There did not seem, perhaps, any very direct practical instruction in his one word of advice, but it appeared to content her craving soul.

'I want to be in the thing,' said a working-man. 'I want to help you all I can. What have I to do?'

'Work,' said Montana, looking fixedly down into his eyes.

The man was of good stature, but Montana was able to look down upon him; and they shook hands, and Montana wrung his friend's rough hand with a gripe which thrilled him.

The man, too, went on his way satisfied. There was not much perhaps in being told to work. He had to work anyhow, and the one word gave him little guidance as to the best way of assisting Montana's special enterprise. But even one word, accompanied by such a look from such a face, and by the grasp of a hand which the working-man found, to his surprise, considerably stronger than his own, was guidance and conviction for the time. The worker passed on, feeling a sort of vague awe, as if he had discoursed with a prophet.

An elderly, white-haired, smooth-spoken, graceful gentleman,

with a double eye-glass, came softly up to Montana, announced himself as the Duke of Magdiel, and said the duchess particularly wished him to request that Mr. Montana would do her the favour of dining with them during his stay in town.

Montana drew back coldly.

'I have not the honour to know you,' he said. 'I have not come to London to be made a show of. I dine with my friends when I have time. You are not among the friends. I have something else to do in life besides going out to amuse strangers and to be stared at.'

The abashed peer mumbled an excuse, of which Montana took little heed. The Duke of Magdiel passed along disconcerted. Incivility puzzled him; he could not see the use of it.

A member of a small, strange, fantastic sect talked for a moment with Montana—a shabby, eager-looking man, whose wild eyes were looking through unkempt hair.

'We are a strange lot,' he said to Montana. 'We are not much in favour here. Everyone dislikes us. They would persecute us if they could.'

'I do not care about that,' said Montana. 'People dislike me, and would persecute me if they could. What do you want of me?'

'We'd like to have a word or two quietly with you. Some of our people would like to join with you, and go out to your new place. We are miserably off here. We have no money, and we have no friends—only enemies. Will you let some of us come and see you?'

'Have you a place of meeting?' Montana asked.

'We have a sort of a place up some flights of back-stairs, down there.'

He jerked his thumb in the supposed direction, and the wild eyes turned towards the east. Somewhere in the East End, doubtless, was the temple of this odd little group of sectaries.

'I will wait on you,' said Montana. 'Send me a message at once. You have only to name the time that suits you, and I will go there.'

This was spoken in a low tone, apparently not meant to be heard; but it so happened that it was heard by most of those in the room. Thus it became known amongst those who were interested in the night's proceedings, that Mr. Montana had repelled with cold contempt the invitation of a duchess, and had promised to go at any time out of his way down to the East End, to wait upon a miserable little group of half-crazy and

poverty-stricken fanatics. The effect was happy. It added to the interest felt in Mr. Montana. Even duchesses were now more anxious than ever to have him under their roofs, and fanatics and sectaries of all kinds were disposed to put full faith in him. The night had been a complete and a splendid success.

A great crowd at the doors of the outer hall waited to catch a glimpse of the new prophet as he passed to the carriage which was known to be waiting for him. But Montana did not go out that way. He passed through a side corridor and a small door in another street, and walked home unseen and alone.

The carriage was there, however, for some time. At last the patient watchers, who still kept hoping for a sight of the prophet, saw that two or three pale and poor-looking girls, apparently of the sempstress class, were put into it by one of the liveried attendants, and heard the coachman get directions to drive them to some place in the Bethnal Green quarter. The patient watchers had something for their delay. They, too, had a story to tell of Mr. Montana. They were able to say to all they met next day, that they had seen Mr. Montana's carriage given up by him for the purpose of driving a few belated milliner girls amongst his audience to their home in Bethnal Green.

CHAPTER VII.

'YOU SAW HER FAIR, NONE ELSE BEING BY.'

Captain Marion's first idea, when he had got possession of money, was to begin to spend it. His impulse, however, always was to spend for the enjoyment of the people around him rather than his own. He had now fallen in for a good thing, as the result of his once-disparaged American speculations, and he was very happy in the prospect of being able to live in a liberal and pleasant manner again. His good fortune brought him a double gratification. First of all, he had the money to spend, and the prospect of a secure and even a rising income; and next, he had the great satisfaction of being able to look boldly in the faces of the prophets of evil, who had kept saying, 'Didn't I tell you so?' when he first put his money into American railways, and nothing seemed likely to come out. He was now able to claim for himself the proud possession of judgment and prescience in his speculations, and by his quiet composure of manner, and his carefully abstaining from any reference to past

censure, he could heap coals of fire upon the heads of those who once would have it that he had brought his family to ruin. He felt a certain satisfaction, too, in being again able to make something of a figure in the eyes of his own family. He had for a good long time been compelled, as he expressed it himself, to play second fiddle to his son-in-law, Mr. Trescoe, and he thought the time had now come when he was fairly entitled to take the leading position, and to show that he could be head of the family in fact as well as in name.

All these considerations, added to a boundless good-nature and an intense love for his daughters, made Captain Marion very happy in the prospect of their first season together in London. It was his intention that he and his two daughters and his daughter Katherine's husband should see out the season in London and then think about their foreign tour. He anticipated immense pleasure from showing his daughters and Miss Rowan everything interesting in London first, and on the Continent afterwards. He had taken a handsome furnished house, with servants and all just as it stood, in one of the streets running off Piccadilly, and meant to make himself very comfortable and even happy for the rest of the season. He soon had many visitors; he gave nice little dinner-parties; and amongst the most frequent of his visitors, at regular and irregular hours, was Mr. Montana.

Mr. Aquitaine did not make much of a stay in London. He was always, as he called it, 'on the wing.' He came up for a day, disappeared for a few days more, to reappear nobody could tell how soon. A short time after the opening address with which Montana had introduced his great enterprise to the London public, Mr. Aquitaine, who had been staying with his daughter in Captain Marion's house, and was expected to consider it his home whenever he turned up in London, was about to make one of his sudden returns to the north. While smoking a cigar with Captain Marion one morning after breakfast, he was told that a gentleman wished to see him, and was handed a card.

'Now look here, Marion: here's a young man in whom I take a great deal of interest, and there is an odd sort of story about him. He wrote to me the other day; he wants to be introduced to Montana; and if it is right to do the thing, you can do it for him better than I could. But I am not certain whether I ought to encourage him. He had better stay where he is, and not think of starting on adventures.

Captain Marion had a sympathetic interest in everybody going

to do anything. He asked with some curiosity who the young man was, and what was his story.

'Well,' Aquitaine said, 'it's not much of a story, and yet there is a certain oddness about it. He was a very poor lad in my town, years ago; I believe his father and mother were people of education and good family, but they made a runaway match, and both died poor somehow, and left him. Just at the time of their death—the father died latest—when this lad was seven or eight years old or thereabouts, a man that I knew in the town lost his son. The son disappeared. He had married a girl of good family—young Fanshawe's sister, by the way; you know young Fanshawe? She died. He disappeared. The old man had been thrown into acquaintanceship with this lad, and he was taken by a certain sort of resemblance in the two stories, somehow. He took the boy as his son, and has kept him ever since. He was a livery-stable keeper, and had horses, and made a lot of money, I believe, and he has settled in London now. I knew this young fellow well, and liked him. He used to come to our house, and—well, there is a lot more that I need not trouble you with. Anyhow, I will go and see him, and if I should ask you to introduce him to Montana, you won't mind doing so, will you?'

Captain Marion not only promised, but was delighted at the chance of a new recruit. Already in his mind he was filled with the idea of a romantic, generous, aspiring youth, determined to lend his hand in founding a great enterprise, and destined to be his own lieutenant, companion, and friend in the brilliant portentous movement which he saw before him in the enchanting distance.

Just as he was about to leave the room Aquitaine bethought himself of something, and turned back.

'Before I go, Marion,' he said, 'don't you go putting any of your money into this scheme of Montana's. I am not saying anything against him; he may be very sincere; I dare say he is; but nothing will come of this; and you want your money for your daughters and yourself.'

Marion was disposed to be a little evasive—at least, evasive for him. He was afraid of what he considered his friend's terribly practical nature and business habits. Aquitaine passed among the business men of his own town for somewhat of a visionary, because of his generous and charitable disposition.

'It isn't a matter of money,' Marion answered; 'it's a matter of faith and energy. I think it is a grand idea to start a new

world there yonder in the heart of the new world ; a place where the true laws of freedom and of health may be fairly tried out, as you know they never can have a chance of being tried under our old systems, even in America not to say in England. You know that yourself, Aquitaine ; I've heard you say twenty times that the laws of health have no fair chance of being tested here.'

'Yes, the laws of health, to be sure; I've said that often enough. But, laws of health?—good gracious! your friend is going in for trying out every principle known to the imagination of man! Art, and science, and religion, and morals, and all the rest, are to be revolutionised. The city is to be like something in the Apocalypse, or in a fairy story. Streets of silver and gold, I believe.'

'No, no ; nothing of the kind.'

'Well, will you promise me not to have anything to do with the whole thing—at least, until you see it tried and have some idea of what it will come to?'

'No, I'll not promise that, certainly,' Marion said warmly. 'I should much rather promise to have nothing to do with it at all than to look coldly on until it had proved itself, and then to sneak in and claim a share in the glory. That would be like the sailor in the old story, who hid in a cask until the fight was over and his ship had won, and then crept out and asked how much prize-money was coming to him.'

Aquitaine remained silent for a moment. Then he said :

'One word, Marion—I never like worrying people with advice when they have their minds made up as you have.'

'It's not a question of having my mind made up; it is a question of duty. All my life I have had a vague longing for some such chance as this ; and it has come. That is all.'

'You have a mission, in fact ; quite so. Of course, in that case, I need not advise. Well, there is just this ; do you mean to pull your daughters into this business?'

'I don't mean to pull them into it ; Katherine is very keen on it already.'

'What does her husband say?'

'Oh, well,' Marion answered with a smile, 'I suppose he says whatever she says.'

'Are you all going to be among the pioneers of this interesting enterprise?'

'I shall be among the pioneers or not in it at all,' Marion answered resolutely.

'When are the pilgrim fathers going to take shipping? And where is the new colony to be founded?'

'Oh, well, you know, things haven't come as far as that yet. There is a great deal to be done before we get to that.'

'I see; I am very glad to know that the site has not been fixed on yet.'

'No; that can be done later. As yet it is all but a thought in the mind of one man.'

'Indeed! A thought in the mind of one man? I am pleased to know that; may it long remain in that condition! I am less despondent about you all, now that I know that much. Only, I do beg of you, Marion, don't be carried away altogether by the advice of women in a matter of this kind. You are much too apt to be guided and governed by women. Do reflect that in such a case you ought to be the guide. You know how their feelings and sympathies carry them away. All the better they are for it, as far as feeling goes; but they want some one to control them in a thing like this. They think Montana is a prophet and an angel because he has fine eyes and odd ways.'

Marion smiled.

'A bad shot, Aquitaine. My womankind are greatly divided about this enterprise. Sydney is not clear at all about it; and Geraldine—Miss Rowan—is dead against it; she can hardly be got to say a good word for Montana.'

'I am very glad to hear it. She has more brains than the lot of you put together. Excuse me, Marion, if I don't flatter you. I was afraid Montana had bewitched all your group of girls. Thank Heaven, Mrs. Aquitaine isn't a woman likely to be moved to any exertion of mind or body; and I don't think my Mel is a very susceptible little person.'

'Does Melissa take no interest in all this?' Captain Marion asked, with a certain hesitation. He had had hints from his daughter Katherine which would not have conveyed that impression.

'No; not the least. I don't think she takes much interest in anything. Sometimes I could wish that she had a little more sentiment about her. She seems to me to have almost no feeling at all—in that sentimental way, I mean. Well, well, we can't have everything. It's very satisfactory to me just now to find that she isn't likely to be much interested in your new founder and prophet. Anyhow, I leave you with an easier mind, Marion, seeing that this grand enterprise is only in the air, so far. What are you going to call your new city, when it is built? Cloud-cuckoo-capital? Xanadu? or is it to have a name like the original name of Rome, which no men are to know or speak?'

The friends parted soon after, each much concerned for the other. Captain Marion felt a certain doubt as to whether he ought not to give Aquitaine a hint that his daughter did not seem so absolutely unconcerned about the Montana project as he supposed; but he did not know enough to justify him, he thought, in disturbing Aquitaine's mind with suspicion or alarm. It might be only a nonsensical idea of Katherine's. Katherine did not like girls, and always suspected them of something or other. If anything more were to come of it, if the girl should really form a wish to go out to the new colony, Aquitaine must be consulted by her, and would know how to act. In any case, the colony was not likely to be founded for some time to come. There was time enough yet—and Marion usually got out of any mental perplexities by reflecting that there was time enough yet. He took it for granted that in any case Aquitaine would not allow his daughter to have anything to do with the enterprise; and there was no harm, therefore, to come of letting things alone for the moment.

Aquitaine was greatly relieved to find that the enterprise was not yet starting into real life. He knew enough of his friend to know that with time for a change of ideas the change might easily come. Still, he was disturbed about him. 'On my life,' he said to himself, 'I wish he would marry that girl. It's absurd a man at his time of life, with a married daughter, thinking of getting married again; but I do believe in his case it would be the best thing he could do. She is a sensible and a clever girl; and she would make a capital wife, I am sure. She would keep him in order charmingly without his knowing it.' In true masculine fashion Mr. Aquitaine never stopped to ask himself the question whether it was likely Miss Rowan would marry Captain Marion. Men usually assume that a man has only to ask and to have, except in the case of some women of their own family, when they are apt to think of his proposal as like the fellow's impudence.

As he went to meet his visitor, Aquitaine kept looking at the visitor's card. It bore the name of 'Clement Hope.'

'No "Mr." of course,' Aquitaine murmured. 'Rights of man, to be sure; equality and all that. Exactly. Poor Clem! Poor Clem!'

He then entered a neat little reception-room and found poor Clem himself.

Clement Hope was sitting in a great arm-chair, with his hands hanging listlessly down between his knees, and his eyes fixed

on the floor. His whole attitude and aspect suggested uncertainty and despondency; suggested the condition of one who does not know in the least what to do with himself. Otherwise the young man, except for his dress, seemed as if he might have stepped out of a painting by Andrea del Sarto. Melancholy eyes, careless hair, a short moustache, a short peaked beard, a poetically loose collar, dark complexion, a sort of feminine gentleness of expression, contrasting curiously enough with a robust figure and strongly made hands and wrists—these were the principal characteristics of the figure at which Mr. Aquitaine now looked with a sort of compassionate friendliness.

They had a cordial, almost affectionate meeting.

'So, Clem, my boy, you want to be up and doing? You want to join the enterprise of the great Montana?'

'Yes, Mr. Aquitaine—I want to do something.'

'But why were you thinking about that just now? You could not possibly leave your father—I may call him your father?'

'You may, Mr. Aquitaine; he has been better to me than most fathers, I fancy. No, I should never think of leaving him, as things go now. That would never do.'

'I should think not,' Aquitaine said quickly. 'You should be a precious ungrateful fellow if you were to think of leaving him—and I know you are not ungrateful, Clem.' He hastened to add this, for the young man's cheeks reddened.

'I would go into the pit of Acheron for him!'

'Hullo!' Aquitaine interrupted; 'pit of Acheron?'

'Well, why not pit of Acheron?' Clement said good-humouredly, but looking a little abashed at the manner in which his emphatic declaration was met.

'Why not, indeed! Only, it sounded a little poetic, didn't it? Are you taking to poetry, my boy?'

'Oh no; I wish I could!'

'Well, you can read and enjoy it—that's enough.'

'Yes, I can do that—thank Heaven.'

'You are in earnest,' Aquitaine said.

'Yes, I am in earnest about everything. I mean all I say, Mr. Aquitaine; I feel all I say.'

Their eyes met sympathetically.

'I am sure you do; I am sorry for it sometimes,' Aquitaine replied. They had some little secret between them, evidently.

'You have not got rid of that nonsense yet, then, I suppose?' Mr. Aquitaine said, after a moment of silence.

You mean about Miss Aquitaine?'

'I mean that. That is the nonsense.'

'No, I have not got rid of that. I mean to carry that always with me. It isn't nonsense; at least, of course, I know it would be nonsense if I were really foolish enough to fancy that anything could come of it. But you know, Mr. Aquitaine, I never did that; you know I never spoke a word of it to anyone but yourself; and only to you to explain what might have seemed strange and rude, perhaps, otherwise.'

'My good boy,' Aquitaine said gravely, 'you know what I think of your conduct. You know I think you acted like a true gentleman and a splendid fellow. If I had a son, Clem, I should have wished him in such a case to act exactly as you did, and not otherwise. I should have been proud of him; I dare say I should have thought him too good for any girl that ever put on a petticoat. I think so of you. When I speak of nonsense, it isn't anything about the money Melissa may have, or the sort of thing that is called position in a provincial town. In my place we all earn a living one way or another; we have no gentlemen there, unless you come to the county families, who in their hearts don't recognise much difference between Melissa's father and yours. I don't mean that; I mean that the thing wouldn't suit at all. Melissa isn't your form, take my word for it. The child is my darling little daughter; but I can see with half an eye that she has more faults than she has dresses—even.'

'Please don't, Mr. Aquitaine.'

'You would rather think she has no faults, I dare say. But, after all, I fancy I am a good deal fonder of Melissa than you are——'

Clement shook his head.

'Well, I shall be fonder of her two years hence than you will. Oh yes; you need not protest. We have all suffered in that way and got over it. I tell you, Clem, I like you so well that if anybody else concerned in the matter was willing, and you had more money than they could count on 'Change in half a day, my advice to you would be not to marry Melissa Aquitaine. Come, it isn't often a father has given advice like that, is it? But it is sincere. I know my little girl better than you do, and I don't believe she could make you a good wife. I don't think she is capable of much love. I don't think she could put up with anything or be of one humour long. I sometimes think she is incapable of loving—and for *his* sake, whoever he may be, I should almost wish it were so. There! those are my sentiments.'

'All the same, I love her.'

'No, you don't. I know you think you do; but you don't.'

'Perhaps you know what I feel better than I do myself,' Clement said, with a melancholy smile.

'I know much better than you what the strength of the feeling is, and how long it is likely to last. Stuff and nonsense! If I found you groaning with the toothache, and were to tell you that you would think the gout, if you had it, much worse, you probably wouldn't believe me. Perhaps you would ask whether I could judge of your feelings better than you could yourself. I should say, Yes; and when you came to have the gout, you would know that I was right.'

'The cases are rather different. You can't know what I feel, Mr. Aquitaine.'

'Of course I know you think you feel more than anybody ever did before or ever will again. But, my good boy, that in itself is only one familiar symptom. That only confirms my view. We have all been like that. Come, come, you are in the age for falling in love; and Melissa came in your way, and she is a pretty girl, and her very little pertnesses and ill-humours had a charm for you. Tut, tut! I know all about it, you'll find. And you have taken her for your ideal. You are in love with your ideal girl, not Melissa Aquitaine. She isn't anyone's ideal, even her father's.

'Well, anyhow, that's one reason why I want to get away out of this. I want to live in some earnest, active, striving sort of way; I want to fight a stiff battle of life.'

Aquitaine smiled.

'We miss those Saracens terribly,' he said. 'It was such a relief to every disappointed fellow in the chivalrous days to be able to go and fight the Saracens. Well, perhaps the West may help us out of our difficulty. You want to have a hand in Montana's project—his New Jerusalem—I suppose?'

'I should like to know something about it. Of course I couldn't go now. I wouldn't leave *him* for all the objects in the world, unless he was quite willing. But I can't help always looking out for something that may turn me free to go wherever I choose.'

'You are not speculating on his death, surely?' Aquitaine said, with a certain surprise and harshness in his tone.

'No; I don't like to think of such a misfortune as that. And happily we need not think of it; he has splendid health, and has years and years before him, I hope. No; I was thinking of something that would make him happy, and set

me free to go and bury myself wherever I chose. I was thinking that some day his son will come back to him.'

'Why on earth do you think that?'

'Well, for one thing, he is firmly convinced of it himself. You see, he never heard any account of his son's death; and he is convinced he will come back some day.'

Aquitaine shook his head.

'Either he is dead long ago, or he has no intention of coming back. Why should he never have written? Did he never write?'

'Never.'

'Then why should he never have written, if he meant to come back? Oh no; he is either dead, or he has married and forgotten all about the people at home. He has grown rich, and does not want to come back; or he is poor, and is ashamed. The chances are many to one, I should say, that he is dead.

'Still, if it should not be so—and he firmly believes it will not be so—I should feel sadly out of place here. There would be no need of me any more. I should feel in the way more than anything else. You have no idea how he longs for his son—every year more and more.'

'What does your father want you to do?' Aquitaine asked.

'Well, that is the worst of it; he wants me to do nothing. He wants me just to stay with him always, and tells me I shall have plenty of money when—that is, afterwards—you know. But that seems to me an unmanly sort of life. I am hanging on, doing nothing——'

'You are learning something. You are studying, I suppose?'

'Yes, I am studying a good deal, and I should be happy enough if that seemed the right sort of thing to do. I can sit in a room with books half the day and half the night too, and be perfectly happy, but that doesn't seem the way that a man ought to spend his life. I am fond of books, but I am afraid I should never do anything in the literary line. I don't think I have any gift of poetry or prose, or anything else. I don't believe I have the gift of expression at all,' Clement said despondently. 'I am sure I couldn't paint a picture, or model a statue, or make a drawing for a house, or do anything of that kind. I can't expect to lead the life of a *dilettante* scholar in a library. I think I should make a good settler or an explorer—these are times when one may easily find something to do with energy and enterprise about it. But all that would only come up if what I told you of were to happen. If this young man should come back——'

'He would not be much of a young man now,' said Aquitaine.

'No; I forgot about that. I was thinking of him as if he always ought to be what he was when he went away. If he should come back, I should be *de trop* in the business, to say the least of it.'

'Did you ever see the son?' Aquitaine asked.

'I never saw him; no. I never even heard he had gone until afterwards.'

'I never saw him,' said Aquitaine; 'at least, I never remember seeing him. I know he was in our office for some years; but there were a lot of people there, and I was about the world then more than I am now, and my attention was never called to him. I do not even know what he was like.'

'His father thinks he was like me,' Clement murmured dreamily, 'but that must be a mere fancy. I believe he was very good-looking.'

Aquitaine looked quickly at the young man; but Clement was evidently not fishing for a compliment. There was a mirror near him; he had not even glanced at it. He was moodily looking down.

'Clearly that must have been a mere fancy,' Aquitaine said, with a smile.

'Oh yes!' Clement replied.

'Well—I am in a difficulty about you,' Aquitaine said, 'and I'll put it into plain words. I don't like the idea of your going out on this wild-goose chase to found your New Atlantis, or whatever it is; and I should be terribly sorry to hear that you had left the kind old man who has been so good to you.'

'I'll not leave him while he wants me; that's certain. Nothing on earth will make me do that.'

'Very well; I quite believe you mean all you say. I don't much like the chance of your being taken in tow by Montana, either: I don't believe in him. But, then, I hate the idea of your wasting any more of your time thinking over this little crotchety girl of mine. Will you promise me to try to shake off that thought—to get rid of it once for all?'

'Why should I do that? It makes life sweet to me. It doesn't do her any harm. I shall never speak of it to her or to anyone. But it is all I have that makes life dear—the thought of her.'

'In Heaven's name!' Aquitaine exclaimed, 'why don't you take to writing poems? It would be ever so much better; you could work off the nonsense that way. The rhymes take so

much out of one? The most unmanageable poets of all are the poets who don't compose any poetry. My dear good Clem, will you promise me to begin at once a series of sonnets—a short series, only a hundred and fifty or so—to my daughter?'

'You laugh at me, but I don't mind.'

'No; that's the worst of it; I wish you did.'

'Because I know you mean it kindly. Nothing coming from you can give me pain.'

'Oh, hang it all!—I know; because I am the father of HER. Well, listen, Clem; you said you never would speak to her—Her, with a big capital—unless you had my consent. My dear boy, you have my consent. Nothing better could possibly happen to you than to try your chance. If that doesn't cure you, nothing will. Go along, there's a good fellow, and ask my daughter to marry you. Faith of a heavy father—a somewhat heavy-hearted father now and then—if she consents, I'll not stand in the way; and neither, I can promise you, will her mother.'

The young man's eyes had flashed fire for a moment, but then he became graver than ever.

'Now you really are laughing at me,' he said; 'and this is a sharper jest than the other.'

'I am not laughing at you,' Aquitaine replied, in a tone that was almost stern. 'I am very much in earnest. I don't believe anyone can cure you of this nonsense half so well as my daughter herself. Go to her; tell her in poetic language how much you love her; offer her your hand and heart—I have reason to believe you'll find her in a remarkably melting mood just now.'

'I know well enough she would only laugh at me; I don't want to ask her; I don't want her to marry me, if it comes to that; why should such a girl think of a fellow like me? It would be a shame. I only want to love her.'

'Go and tell her so,' Aquitaine said, 'and then let me hear from you again.'

CHAPTER VIII.

ROMEO AND ROSALIND.

Good fortune and bad fortune had combined to make Montana what he now was. The buffets and the rewards had conspired to decide his fate, each the wrong way. The buffets did not either correct or discourage; the rewards did not satisfy. His personal beauty was perhaps his first stimulus to the belief that he must be destined for great things. He felt that the gods had

set their seal on him by making him beautiful, as the Greek orator declared of Phryne. His love-match had shown him that he could impress women with a sense of his power. His grief and his disappointment had filled him with a despair which, while it lasted, was akin to madness. He had suffered intensely; sorrow, dull, protracted, seemingly hopeless struggle, and iron poverty had tried to bear him down. He had seemed as if destined to end a drear life by some death of utter misery. Yet through all his worst times he had felt the same faith in his destiny—in his mission. He felt confident that he was tried in the fire of adversity only that he might be made the stronger for some great work which was to be assigned to him.

Men more pious and far better instructed than Montana have also believed that in every sorrow inflicted on them there was only a purpose personal to them, to make them stronger for this world, or touch their souls so as to make them fitter for the next. The loved father perishes in his prime; the wife of a man's youth is taken from his side; the little daughter is snatched from the blossoming promise of her sweet childhood; and the survivor, not content with bending to the will of the benignant powers above, and quietly believing that all must be for the best, complacently makes a moral special to himself, and assumes that others have been victimised in order that his poor little personality may have all the benefit. It does not occur to him to ask why any other should suffer in order that he might be made the better; whether Providence may not have designs of a larger mould than those which concern only his particular career. Montana was one of that class of suffering egotists. Any stroke of fate falling on himself or those he loved—they were not many—he assumed to be intended for his own special behoof, in order to fit him all the more for the great mission whereof the nature and object were yet to be disclosed. This almost sublime egotism sustained him. Prosperity came at once along various paths, and he took the prosperity as he had taken the suffering. He accepted it as a proof that he was destined for great things. His egotism case-hardened him against fear and against arrogance.

For a time, after the climax of his struggle had passed away, everything seemed to go well with him. He had made a fair repute in the American Civil War; first having entered the campaign merely as a philanthropical attendant on the hospitals, and then serving as a soldier. He had taken up philanthropic land speculations after the war; taken them up without any primary purpose of making money; and even where the success

of the philanthropic scheme was doubtful, the fact that money came in to Montana was beyond all doubt. He turned lecturer, became a sort of unconsecrated preacher; and he drew fashionable crowds after him in the United States, even when he most earnestly proclaimed that he desired only the presence of the poor. He might have made a wealthy match easily enough at any time. Rich women had told him as much, and he had only drawn back. He gave away money freely and in large sums. His career seemed absolutely free from any evidence of personal object; and yet, all who were not devotees in him distrusted him.

There were three orders of opinion concerning Montana. There was first the enthusiastic worship of the devotee, which does not call for minute analysis. The devotees were, to be sure, chiefly women; but they were not by any means women only. There were many men, wherever Montana was known, who believed in him as their hero, or prophet, or saint. There were business men who on his advice would have flung all their property into some speculation of which they had never heard the day before. There were men who would have voted for any candidate or anything on a word of recommendation from him. In this country we commonly think of the society of America as made up only of shrewd, eager-faced business men, who set the making of money above every other purpose in life. We hear little of that very considerable proportion of the men of every American community, who are as accessible to the influence of sentimentalism or emotionalism of some kind as the heroine of an old romance might have been. The worship of the devotees made one order of opinion. Then came a certain proportion of kindly unbelievers, who merely shook their heads and quietly said that Montana was crazed. Lastly came those, not a few in number, who declared him to be a mere quack, a particularly shallow impostor. It is surprising how many powerful arguments each believer could bring forward in support of his own theory. Speak to each one in turn, and let him have it all his own way for the time, and he would give reasons that made conviction seem hardly to be avoided. Then speak to one of the other school, and you began insensibly to be drawn into a recognition of the soundness of his theory.

The impostor theory was greatly supported by the fact that Montana, in company, evidently kept a constant guard over his utterances. It would not need to be a very keen observer to see that Montana was always watching you and himself. He never answered a question promptly. He looked quietly at his

questioner, and shaped his answer very slowly. Sometimes he did not answer at all—merely shook his head and slightly smiled, and could not be got to give any reply. It was impossible not to see now and then, by the expression of his eyes, that he was thinking what he ought to say, or whether he ought to say anything. On the other hand, his admirers, admitting all these peculiarities, saw in them only fresh evidence of sincerity and of inspiration. When, they asked, did Montana on one of his platforms ever want a word or an answer? What could be more rapid, instantaneous, than the flash of his decisive reply to the port-fire touch of a question? For what suggested difficulty in morals or in actual life had he not the quick word of guidance for those who believed in him? This, too, was true. In ordinary society, his admirers said, he is simply a man *distrait*, conscious of higher purposes and occupations, only enduring the dinner-table, and evading idle chatter.

Montana might have been the happiest man living on the earth. He had found himself suddenly lifted to that dangerous elevation, the height of his wishes. He was one of the most marked figures of a London season. Wherever he went people looked at him, and after him, and started as he passed, and called the attention of their friends to him, and whispered his name, and sometimes indeed did not even whisper it, but spoke it loudly enough to have hurt the feelings of a different sort of man, but only enough to thrill Montana with a new sense of his success. Women of all ranks paid court to him, and frankly conveyed their admiration of him. There was supposed to be something like a mysterious sanctity about his assumed character of leader, priest, and prophet, which rendered unnecessary the becoming reticence that would have had to be adopted in the case of a more worldly hero. A great many London men, too, of all ranks and classes, admired him, and believed in him. He was a hero to a considerable mass of the working population, those who had a dash of freethinking in them. He was not robust enough to satisfy the ordinary Radical artisan of cities, but to those whose views of life were a little more shadowy, and a little less political, he served admirably as a hero and an orator. He was in society, passing through the very best of London society sometimes, and yet wholly ungoverned by its conventions and above its rules, even regarded as the more interesting because he thus set himself above its ordinances and paid them no attention. He had several little habits which at first made people stare, and always made some people angry, and

forced others to smile, and yet in the eyes of his admirers seemed all the more becoming to his position. When he went to dine at a great house, he shook hands with the butler or the footman, as well as with the master or mistress, if the butler or footman happened to have become an acquaintance of his by attending any of his meetings. His manner was always stately, grave, and sweet. Nothing surprised him. He had the composure of a Red Indian chief, who disdains to be dazzled or even moved by any of the splendours of civilisation.

Montana's name was constantly in the papers. He attended meetings of almost all kinds which had any savour of philanthropy or the higher life about them, and he possibly committed himself to a good many movements and causes which could hardly have worked very well in combination. His ambition had now nearly reached its crowning point. He was the hero of a London season, the prophet of a large number of faithful followers, the leader of a great new enterprise in civilisation, which had not yet become troublesome, inconvenient, or disappointing, for the good reason that it had not yet even begun to move; and he was the idol of a great many admiring and attractive women. But there was one thought which disturbed him. He remembered past times more keenly than he could have wished. His passionate longing was to bury all the early past in actual forgetfulness. He hated to have to think of the origin from which he sprang. He destested the thought of his father having been a livery-stable keeper who gave lessons in riding. If his father had been dead he would soon enough have forgotten all about him, and might have satisfied his conscience by an easy kind of penitence, all the more easy to certain minds because, being unavailing and too late, it involves no considerable trouble or self-sacrifice. But he had found that his father was not dead; was living just now in London. The thought constantly disturbed him. He could not be sure of forgetting the past, or burying the past, as long as this living link with it was present and near. Besides, despite all his egotism and his confused dreamings and aspirations, he had still some remains of a sensitive conscience. It stung him now and then to think that he knew of his father's existence, and not only did not go to him and announce himself as the long-lost son, but was anxious above all things never to meet him, never to be recognised by him, and never to have to face the terrible alternative of acknowledging himself the livery-stable keeper's son, or bluntly denying the relationship. It was brought home

to his inner convictions sometimes, that if his father and he should meet in public, and his father should claim him, he would repudiate the claim and deny that he was his father's son. He struggled with this horrible thought and tried to escape it, as was his way, in dreams. Montana was a dreamer, and not a man of imagination. Had he had imagination, it would have fed itself on other food than his own morbid personality. It would have created images for him out of 'the barren realms of darkness,' and have peopled his lonelier hours with beings that might some of them have become his ideal and his guide. But he was merely a dreamer, and could think only of his own plans, and his past and his future; and he brooded so on these, that the real was often not to be distinguished by him from the unreal. He began to persuade himself that his obscure past must have been but a dream. He was gliding into the conviction that he would be right in repudiating any claim which an obscure person professing to be his father might venture to make. He could not endure the ridicule of such a revelation; his cause must suffer by it; it could not therefore be in the nature of things or the will of Heaven that one entrusted with so great a mission should be left a victim to men's scorn.

Meanwhile, his friendship with Captain Marion became closer and closer. His visits always delighted Marion, but did not seem otherwise to spread much joy around them. Geraldine Rowan avoided him as much as she could do without attracting attention. Melissa saw him only; rarely was spoken to by him.

Melissa was growing daily paler, more languid, and more unsatisfactory in condition. Mr. Aquitaine many times thought it would be better to take her back to the country again; but Melissa obstinately resisted: and when any little trial of strength of will arose, Melissa was in the habit of carrying the day. She did so in this instance, and she positively declared that she found herself much better in London than she would be anywhere else, and Mr. Aquitaine gave way. There was apparently nothing in her condition for which the doctor's skill could do any good. Melissa began by refusing to see a doctor; and then, when by a variety of stratagems she was brought into the presence of a physician and induced to talk with him, he really found nothing to suggest any ailment which his craft could cure.

Mr. Aquitaine once took an opportunity of saying a word to Miss Marion, and urged her to try and find out what was amiss with his daughter. Sydney tried her best, but could not succeed. She was unable to put herself exactly into sympathy with her

wilful little friend. Just about this time, Geraldine Rowan had been making up her mind to endeavour to establish something like a friendship between Melissa and herself. She had resolved, hesitated, resolved again, again hesitated; but now a word from Miss Marion about her own attempt and its failure decided Geraldine to try her best. She took Melissa by surprise, invaded her unexpectedly in her own room one day, and broke into the question at once.

'I am afraid you are not well,' she said, 'and I am sure Mr. Aquitaine must be uneasy about you.'

'Has he made you his confidante?' Melissa asked, with eyes in which an anticipated controversy already sparkled.

'No, indeed,' Miss Rowan said; 'he never spoke to me about it, but you seem to me to be out of health and spirits somehow; and if that makes me uneasy on your account, think how much more uneasy it must make him.'

'If my father is uneasy about me,' Melissa said, 'he can tell me so.'

'Come, my dear girl,' Miss Rowan said, 'you might be a little more friendly with me. I believe they say here that you are sick, but I do not think so. I mean, I don't think you are sick in any way that a doctor could cure. I think you are out of spirits. I think something has gone wrong with you. Perhaps something has disappointed you; and surely these are things that one girl might talk to another girl about. We are friends, are we not?'

'I suppose you mean it well,' Melissa answered; 'I dare say you do; you are just the sort of girl who means everything well. Everybody says you do everything well; but I do not. I seldom mean things well, and I don't think I am at all inclined to be a friend of yours.'

'Yet I want to win your friendship very much,' said Geraldine; 'and I think I could deserve it. You have always shown yourself cold and unfriendly to me, but I don't mind that; I don't care for misunderstandings of that kind, and I don't a bit mind being met with an ungenial answer. I don't care about personal dignity. I want to be your friend.'

'We can never be friends,' said Melissa, getting up from her chair; 'I hate you, and there is an end of it.'

Geraldine was certainly somewhat shaken from her composure by this blunt declaration. To be told that one is actually hated, and told this by a little girl whose flashing eyes and trembling lips show that she means exactly all that she says, and at the

same time not to have the least idea of anything which could give cause for such a feeling of detestation—this would be enough to disturb the nerves of even a philosopher. Geraldine was not a philosopher, but only a bright, good-hearted girl, who thought she saw a way of rendering a service, and was determined to go on if she could. She recovered her composure after a moment.

'Why do you hate me, Miss Aquitaine? I always liked you, and I am sure I never did anything that could make you feel so bitterly against me.'

'I hate you all the same,' said Melissa. She seemed to find a certain sense of relief in the declaration.

'But won't you tell me why? There may be some mistake. There must be. You have fancied I said or did something which I did not say or do. I am not at all a good hater myself; but if I did hate anyone, I am sure I would tell the reason.'

Melissa turned away and seated herself again in her chair. It was a great luxurious arm-chair, large enough to hold the portly frame of some old-fashioned grandfather, or to embrace all the ample draperies of an eighteenth-century belle. Melissa curled herself up in it, and looked with her beaming eyes, her pretty face, and her pouting, impatient gestures, like some beautiful but dangerous little animal — a wild-cat perhaps, or a snake, coiled up, and only waiting for a spring on some enemy.

Geraldine went over and knelt by the side of the chair, leant her head against it, and took Melissa's reluctant hand and held it firmly, as indeed she had strength enough to do; and then said, in the soothing tone one uses with a sick child, 'You must tell me why you don't like me. I will not let you go until you explain it all. I am quite determined there shall be no unkindness between you and me if I can possibly prevent it. You know how much I like your father, and I think he likes me.'

'Of course he does,' Melissa said; 'everybody likes you except myself, and that's just it: everybody likes you; the people I like best in the world like you better than they like me.'

'What people that you like best in the world,' Geraldine asked, 'like me better than they like you? Your father is immensely fond of you. I never saw anyone more fond of a girl; and your mother, and everybody I know. How could they care for me in that way? I am only a girl to whom they are friendly, and whom they saw for the first time a few weeks ago, and soon won't see any more. How can you grudge me their passing kindness?'

'No, it is not that,' said Melissa; 'it is not for my father. It is for—for everybody.'

And Melissa burst into a passion of tears.

Geraldine was touched to the heart by this sudden and unexpected outbreak. Now she felt sure indeed that poor Melissa's trouble was of the spirit and not of the body; but what could she do to soothe her? How could she ask her for a confidence which, for aught she knew, might concern some family tale not to be told to any stranger's ear? Melissa's own words showed that it had something to do with herself. Could it be that Melissa was jealous of the friendship which the Marions, father and daughter, showed to Geraldine? This seemed hardly possible; and yet, what else was there? Meantime, she found nothing better to do than to put her arm, with gentle resoluteness, round Melissa's neck and draw the girl towards her, and quietly press her little nervous hand in token of friendship and sympathy. Melissa at all events made no resistance now. Geraldine began to hope that she would soon return the pressure of sympathy.

A knock at the door made the girl start. A servant brought a card for Miss Aquitaine.

'Do please read the name; can't you read the name?' Melissa asked in a tone of petulance.

Geraldine took the card. 'Clement Hope,' she said.

'Oh, I can't see him; I won't see him. Pray send him away. Tell him to call again to-morrow; next week; next year.'

'Who is he? A friend of your father's?'

'Oh yes;—wait outside, Jane; I'll call you in a moment. Oh yes. My father delights in him; adores him; my father likes everybody. He is a dreadful man—not my father, but Clement Hope; a dreadful boy; silly, sickening goose. He takes it into his ridiculous head, I believe, to fall in love with me—at least, I believe he does—and I hate him.'

'You seem to hate us all, dear, don't you?' Geraldine said with a smile.

Melissa positively smiled in return. The very absurdity which she saw in the visit of her hapless lover seemed to rouse her into better spirits.

'I don't think I hate you now so much as I did; and, anyhow, I know you are just the sort of good girl to get me out of this scrape. How could I go and see him? Look at my eyes; look at my cheeks; how could I see anyone? Will you see him, Miss Rowan? I'll call you Geraldine if you will go and see him

and send him away. Tell him to call to-morrow; papa wouldn't like it if we simply turned him away. Say I'm not well, and I'm *not* well; get rid of him for to-day. I needn't ask you to be kind to him, for you are kind to everyone; it's your way: you like it; I don't. But he's a nice boy, people say, if he were not such a fool; and I suppose, after all, he isn't much more of a fool than other creatures.'

'I don't see any particular evidence of folly in what you say of him,' Geraldine said with a kindly smile. 'I am not at all surprised; I can imagine a very wise boy falling in love with you.'

'Can you, really? That's very nice of you to say, anyhow. But he is such a nuisance all the same, and I won't have it,' Melissa declared with renewed energy.

'I'll go and see him with pleasure,' Miss Rowan said. 'When may he come?' For she fancied that, somehow, Melissa did not really want to have him dismissed once for all.

'I would much rather he never came, but papa wouldn't stand that, I am afraid, even from me. Let him come to-morrow at five. There will be other people here then, and he can't talk to me. He can talk to you. I dare say you will discover all sorts of great and good qualities in him. I declare I think he is just such another good person as you are—good-natured and sweet; and not malicious and bad-tempered, and all that, like some who shall be nameless.'

Miss Rowan went at once to see the fond youth whom Melissa would not favour. Clement turned round with deepened colour and sparkling eyes when he heard the rustle of a woman's dress.

Even Miss Rowan, for all her short sight, could not fail to see the shade of disappointment which came over his face as he looked upon a strange young woman and not Melissa. Geraldine's heart was touched by his expression. He looked very handsome and winning, she thought, and worthy of all compassion. It came over her mind that if she could have a brother, she could wish to have one like him.

'Miss Aquitaine begs you will excuse her,' she said; 'she is not quite well to-day, and cannot see anyone. But she hopes you will call to-morrow about five.'

'Miss Marion, I presume?' Clement said.

'No, not Miss Marion; Miss Rowan, a friend of Captain Marion's—and of Miss Aquitaine, too.'

'She will see me to-morrow?' Clement asked.

'She will see you to-morrow; yes, certainly. She is not seriously unwell, but she is not well enough to see anyone to-day. But she will see you to-morrow; I can promise you that.'

She smiled, and held out her hand to him as he was taking his leave. Their eyes met; and Clement knew, both by her look and by the touch of her hand, that she somehow had his secret and felt sympathy with him.

CHAPTER IX.

ON TOWER HILL.

Clement Hope had come apparently on a fool's errand. From the moment of his leaving Mr. Aquitaine the day before, he had been filled with a wild desire to take the father at his word and go straight away and propose to the daughter. He could not possibly have explained why this insane impulse took possession of him; but it seized him in a moment, and could not be shaken off.

'Anyhow, it will end the matter,' he thought, and he felt a sort of wild and bitter desire that his repulse might be all as painful as Mr. Aquitaine had led him to expect. Let the knife be applied to the diseased part of his frame; let the cautery burn out the idle passion which wasted him. The sooner the better. So he paid his visit, and only saw Geraldine. Next day he came again, promptly at five, and sent up his card to Miss Aquitaine.

He was shown into a waiting-room, and he remained there what seemed to him an unending time. His pulses throbbed, and there was a singing in his ears, and he saw objects flickering before him. He sat down; he stood up; he tried to walk up and down the room. His agony was intense. A door opened at last, and a servant came and told him Miss Aquitaine wished him to come upstairs. He followed, feeling more and more alarmed and confused as he approached nearer to the sacred presence.

Clement had expected anything rather than the kind of anti-climax which awaited him. He had made up his mind that somehow he was to be alone with Miss Aquitaine, and now he was shown into a room in which his uncertain eyes could only at first make out that there were several persons. The room was dark with curtains and draperies, and closed jalousies, and lowered blinds, to keep out the rays of the sun; and Clement could for a while hardly discover whether its occupants were people he knew or not. He stood hesitating on the threshold, and apparently looking for Miss Aquitaine, who did not seem in the least degree concerned to relieve his anxiety. His card had been just

the card of the ordinary visitor, and it contained certainly no mysterious impress about it to forbode of a wild young lover and an absurd proposal; and yet poor Clement had, in a vague way, taken it for granted that if he was to be seen at all by Miss Aquitaine, he was to be seen alone, and to have an opportunity of making his declaration and receiving sentence of banishment. Now he came into an ordinary drawing-room, with four or five persons, no doubt of the most commonplace kind, shutting off his cold-hearted true-love from his sight. He advanced into the room, however, as composedly as he could, and he actually succeeded in seeing Miss Aquitaine. She was seated on an ottoman, her profile turned to him; she was talking to a lady, and apparently not thinking about him in the least. He had to go up and call her attention, in the most unheroic and commonplace manner, with the vapid words, 'How do you do, Miss Aquitaine?'

The moment he had said these words he felt that a declaration of love would, under any circumstances, be impossible for that time.

Miss Aquitaine looked round very composedly, and answered his question by putting the same question to him, with apparently little interest in any answer.

'How do you do, Mr. Hope?'

'I did not know you were in town until the other day.'

'No?' said she. 'We have not been long here.'

'I hope you are enjoying yourself,' he remarked.

'Yes,' she replied, 'we have been enjoying ourselves;' in a manner which, whether she meant it or not, almost seemed to imply that at that precise moment she was not enjoying herself.

'I saw Mr. Aquitaine the day before yesterday,' murmured the forlorn youth.

'Indeed?' said the damsel; 'he has gone home again.'

This was dreadful. It was impossible for any lover to get on well after such a fashion as this. Besides, he had paid his compliments to the young lady, he had said his say, and there really seemed nothing for him now but either to fall back and talk to somebody else, or make his escape out of the room as soon as he decently could, and never come back any more. He tried to say another word or two to Melissa, but received neither assistance nor countenance from the young lady, who was now not looking at him at all. He felt himself constrained to fall back. He looked round for somebody else to speak to. There were two or three ladies and one or two gentlemen. He was about wildly to address one of the men who was nearest, and remark to him that

it was a fine day, when he was suddenly saved from his embarrassment by the friendly voice of a woman.

'I am glad to see you again, Mr. Hope. I suppose you are a Londoner; now you can tell me something I want to know about London. We all happen to be strangers here.'

He looked in the face of the lady—the lady ?—no; the beneficent and redeeming angel who had thus rescued him from utter confusion, and taken him by the hand and drawn him within the circle of living humanity. She was tall and dark, and, as he thought, strikingly handsome. One of the faces he most admired in art was the face of the ascending Madonna in that immortal picture of Titian's which stands in the great gallery by the Venetian canal. To his somewhat bewildered eyes it now seemed as though the face and the kindly expression of the girl talking to him were almost as beautiful and delightful as the Madonna of his æsthetic dreams.

Then in an instant he saw that it was the girl who had spoken so kindly to him the day before, and had pledged herself to procure him that interview which had seemed so hopeful and satisfactory; and he felt that she was asking him about London only to relieve him from an embarrassment which she could well understand and feel for. Clement hastened to say that he knew all about London, and could guide anybody everywhere. It turned out that, among other things, Miss Rowan particularly wanted to walk round the Tower of London; to see and study Tower Hill; and she wanted some one to go with her and tell her all about it, and let her linger on any particular spot; some one who was not a professional guide. Miss Marion wanted to go too, and even Melissa would go; but Captain Marion hated old places, especially places down among dingy, narrow streets; and other gentlemen had no particular knowledge of the Tower, and had only a dim recollection of having seen it long ago on the same day as the Thames Tunnel. Geraldine positively declined to go with anyone who regarded the Tower from that point of view. Clement would have been delighted at that moment to act the part of one of the professional guardians of the Tower, beefeater costume and all, if it could have relieved him of the sense of being in everybody's way, and a subject of derision to himself and all the earth.

So it was arranged that next day Clement was to 'personally conduct' a select party to Tower Hill, and that the select party were to walk all the way, and to be shown Eastcheap as they went along, in memory of the wild Prince, and Poins, and Jack Falstaff.

It was a dull and grey afternoon when they reached the Tower. The day had been a very unusual one for summer; not, indeed, unusual because it had been raining heavily in the forenoon, but because there was something more of late winter or early spring than of summer in the atmosphere, and even in the soft rain. When the rain ceased the sky was still heavily hung with grey clouds, and what glimpses could be seen between the dim masses were themselves only a faint and more delicate grey, with streaks of silvery sunlight slanting across. Fancy herself might have been inclined to fail before the prospect of a muddy walk round the Tower; but the young ladies who had resolved on the expedition were not so easily to be discouraged. Miss Rowan had lived in a country where you must make up your mind to go out occasionally in rain and snow, and to tramp over very muddy roads, or else resolve to house yourself and hibernate during all the months between late November and early March. To her, therefore, it seemed nothing to encounter the soft mud of Tower Hill and the possibility of another descent of the rain-showers. The Tower looked picturesque, old, and dream-like under the heavy sky, of which itself was only, it might seem, a softer shade. With its moat, its trees, its old walls, and its round-topped turrets and ancient weathercocks, it looked like a building that might have been moulded out of the clouds themselves, so entirely in harmony was it with the prevailing atmosphere. It was the London of an older time symbolised and made living in stone and mortar. Miss Rowan, like most enthusiastic girls who have been born in America, or who have lived there, was full of interest in every memorial of London in its olden days, in every place which had an association attached to it, which brought her back to history, or poetry, or romance. As she looked at the Tower under that peculiar atmosphere, it seemed to her to be worthy a question whether the world has anywhere a pile of buildings more interesting and better fitted to speak to all the feelings. The river could be seen here and there; and, as the sun slanted across it at one part, it seemed for the moment transfigured into such a silver stream as it might have been even there in the times when Chaucer did the Customs' duties on its bank.

The select party walked round the landward sides of the Tower gardens, doing nothing else but observing from all external points of view, and commenting on the manner in which each new position from which they looked brought out this or that picturesque or historical attribute. Clement was keenly

interested in the Tower, but probably still more interested in the task of pointing out all its peculiarities and beauties to his companions. They became free in a moment from all the meaner associations of the place. They thought nothing of the Minories, or of Lower Thames Street, or of the cab-stand on Tower Hill itself, or of the guides who importuned them as they passed the principal entrance, with the request that they would inspect the Tower inside and see all the wonders. They were really absorbed in contemplation—in admiration of the Tower as it stands; not as a curiosity-shop, but as a great historical building, made picturesque by its site and by its memories, even more, perhaps, than its material structure. But it would be rather too much to say that all the little party of four were equally interested. Melissa was neither interested nor pretended to be. She had come there simply because, little as she cared for the sight, she still less liked to be left at home by herself. She had told her companions that she only came because she did not choose to be left alone, and because, if anything was to be seen, she was not going to be what she called 'out of the swim.' But she cared not much for the historical associations of the Tower. She cared, perhaps, still less for its appearance. She thought the moat a dreary, dirty old place; and her chief impression of the enterprise was, that it was very monotonous walking round rusty old railings, and that the mud was particularly sticky, and very distressing when one had thin and pretty shoes and stockings. Yet it was destined that the expedition should prove to be of more interest to her than to any other of the party. As they were preparing to make another round of the railings, despite Melissa's sad little protest and her eager demand to know whether they had not seen enough of the old thing yet, they saw a tall man crossing Tower Hill, who looked at them, and then made straight for them in so direct a way, that it was clear he was about to claim acquaintance. There was no mistaking the man when he came a little nearer. Melissa forgot for the moment the Tower, the misty atmosphere, her personal fatigue, her hatred of historical buildings, the mud sticking to her shoes, and the chance of spoiling her stockings, when she saw that the new-comer was Mr. Montana.

Melissa was not the only one whose heart beat quickly when Mr. Montana came up and joined the party. Clement almost forgot, for the moment, the fact that his heart was broken by disappointed love, in the surprise of keen interest which Montana's sudden appearance aroused in him. 'Destiny—destiny itself,'

thought our young lover, 'has brought me in his way just now. Here begins my rescue, my career.'

Miss Marion did most of the talking on behalf of the select party. She explained the object of their visit to that region.

'I am here on different business,' Montana said. 'I am interested in an institution here—the Church of Free Souls. Let me walk with you for a little.'

They could not walk round the Tower all five abreast. Clement could not venture to fall back with Melissa; he knew she did not want him. Geraldine was determined that she would not walk alone with Montana, and she resolutely kept with Sydney; besides, Miss Marion and she were interested in the Tower, and wanted to have their attention directed to any new point which might have fresh interest. Clearly it was the duty of our young friend, since the party could not all walk together, to walk with the two young ladies who made his company welcome, and to whom he might be of positive assistance. He had come out as a guide, and they alone wanted to be guided. Naturally, therefore, Melissa fell behind; and as she fell behind Mr. Montana walked with her. She had never before exchanged more than the most formal words of conversation with him. She sometimes fancied that he regarded her merely as a little girl, with whom it was not necessary for a great man like him, occupied in a lofty mission, to exchange anything more than an occasional and ceremonious sentence. She was not usually given to embarrassment, nor at a loss to say straight out whatever she wished to put into words; but this time she was not merely embarrassed. At first she remained absolutely silent.

Montana had contracted the habit of silence, and he too for a while said nothing. But after they had walked a very few paces, it became apparent that if he did not speak neither would she, and that thus they must continue to pace round the Tower in silence. He therefore began:

'I see you don't care much for the Tower, Miss Aquitaine. Do you care for old buildings or historical associations in general?'

'I don't care about them one bit,' Melissa answered in a faint voice, wondering herself to find how young she was, and with what trepidation she got the words out.

'You are right,' Montana said emphatically. 'The time for living in historical associations is past. It is only the indolence of the mind that can busy itself or amuse itself in this way. We must live in the present and for the present. I am glad to think that that is your idea of life too.'

Now, it is not certain that Melissa had any particular idea of life, or that she had ever made it her duty to live for the present any more than for the past or for the future. She had always lived in and for the present—that is to say, for herself; but it had never occurred to her that it might be one's theory of life to live in the present for other people. However, she had a flexible mind, and instantly assumed that such had always been her doctrine and purpose of life, and she accepted the implied sympathy which Mr. Montana's words conveyed.

'I am so glad you like my feeling,' she replied, gaining courage and voice; 'I don't see what we have to do with old buildings or with ruins. This is our time, is it not?'

Then he said, a little abruptly:

'Living for the present, I suppose you make use of your life for the present?'

Melissa had not the least idea what he meant, but she was deeply impressed, and thought there was something prophetic in his manner.

'I am trying,' she said; 'I shall always try. I should try all the more if I had anyone to encourage me; but'—and then she stopped.

'Your people,' he said, 'I suppose, do not think much of the great summons that calls on every one of us in life?'

'No, I don't think they do,' said Melissa, afraid to say much more lest it should plainly appear that she herself did not quite know what the summons was. But she felt more deeply impressed than ever with Montana's words. If he had gone deliberately about to make himself attractive to Melissa, he could not have taken any step more aptly fitted for the purpose than this way of at once addressing her as if she were a grave and responsible being, interested like him in the problems of life. Montana was not really thinking about Melissa. He was only, after his fashion, finding vague imposing sentences to express some general idea. If he had been desirous to captivate the little girl, it is not impossible that he might have gone about it in the usual way, by addressing to her some graceful compliments and conveying with his eyes the impression that he admired her. That would have been powerless indeed, compared with the course he unconsciously took. He had lifted, as it seemed, poor little Melissa into his own atmosphere, into sympathy with him. She stood on the same plane with him; and, metaphorically at least, they were hand in hand. To her it seemed as if for the moment they two were alone.

CHAPTER X.

CLEMENT'S EVENING WALK.

GERALDINE was very thoughtful all the evening after her excursion to Tower Hill. She was a good deal interested in Clement Hope, and somewhat touched as well as amused by his melancholy and his passion. She was sorry that Melissa did not care for him, and yet was inclined to think that it would not be well for the young man if she did.

It is superfluous to say that Geraldine was greatly interested in love-making of any kind. She had never as yet been herself in love. She had not even felt the schoolgirl's immemorial passion for the music-master or the drawing-master. She had had a great deal of admiration, and she often knew well enough that men were hinting love to her; and she had even had direct offers of hand and heart, and so forth. But although she liked men in general, and some men in particular, she had never been brought to heart-throbs for any man as yet. The very fact gave her much of her ease and what might be called good-fellowship in the company of men.

She had lived in all her younger days a happy and a sheltered life. She was so deeply attached to her father, and had such a friend and companion in him, that she liked all mankind the better for him, and no one man in particular, for the same reason. Then came sorrow; and after the worst of the sorrow had passed away, a season of anxiety, not yet drawn to an end, in which money matters were a good deal mixed up. It was not even now certain whether Geraldine and her mother were to be actually poor or not; whether Geraldine would not have to fight her way through the world by teaching, or by such painting as she could do, or in some such way. Her mother was a very sweet but not very strong-minded woman; and the most of the thinking fell upon Geraldine. Her visit to Europe with Captain Marion's family was Geraldine's first holiday of any kind for some years. It was her first uprising after the prostration of grief and the long season of anxiety. It was like a convalescent's first drive in the open air. When she was leaving her American home her mother made one earnest request of her. 'Darling, you are going to have a holiday; now, let it be a holiday. Promise me that you will really do your best, your very best, to enjoy yourself; that you won't keep thinking of things that make you anxious, and that you will let yourself be happy with our friends.'

Geraldine promised, and was determined that she would do her very best to keep the promise. It was very, very difficult at first; but as the days went on it became easier and easier, and now in London Geraldine was really and truly enjoying herself. She had by nature a soul and spirit made for enjoyment; made to find happiness easily and to give it freely. She had health and strength, a splendid constitution, and high spirits. Perhaps her courage and elasticity of temperament might have made her even heedless and over-impulsive in her ways, if so much of her natural inclinations had not been curbed and made patient by a sudden sorrow and prolonged anxiety.

'I like your young friend very much,' said Geraldine to Miss Aquitaine that same evening when they had returned to their home.

'What young friend?' asked Melissa languidly.

'Oh, come! you know; your hopeless Hope. I like him very much.'

'Do you?' said Melissa. 'I am very glad. I don't.'

'I think he is a sweet boy,' Geraldine declared.

'He is not quite a boy,' said Melissa; 'I suppose he is four-or-five-and-twenty. I think he is quite old enough to have more sense, and to know what he is going to do with himself. I think he is a very stupid boy, or man, or whatever you choose to call him—stupider even than men in general, if that were possible.'

'He seems to me very clever and full of promise. I should think he is a young man likely to make a name for himself in the world.'

'I wish he would make a name for himself,' said Melissa, 'if he likes it; but what I object to is his trying to make a name for me.'

'I think you like him, after all, at the bottom of your heart,' Geraldine said, trying to find response in Melissa's downcast eyes.

'If he comes here very often he will soon find whether I do or not,' was Melissa's genial answer.

'How do you like Mr. Montana?'

Melissa remained silent, and Geraldine, fancying she had not heard the question, put it again.

'Mr. Montana,' Melissa said at last, 'is a very different person from Clement Hope.'

'Yes, he is indeed,' Geraldine answered with emphasis, '*very* different. If I understand anything of men, I think young Hope is a true man.'

'I don't understand anything of men,' said Melissa, 'and I don't know whether he is true or false, but I don't regard Mr. Montana as an ordinary man, and I don't care to discuss him on the same level with Mr. Hope.'

Somebody entered at this moment, and the conversation dropped. Geraldine was full of pity for Clement Hope, and not without a certain womanly anger for the scornful little maiden who thought so lightly of him and his love. She could not help wondering in her heart what it was that Clement Hope saw in Melissa to make him so completely her slave. 'He seems such a fine noble young fellow,' she thought, 'with a good deal of the poet's soul in him, and after all there is nothing in Melissa. She has not much brains, and I don't think she has any tender feeling; she is a sort of girl who ought to be happy; she has everything she can want for herself, and she scarcely seems to think of anything but herself; she is safe against any chance of falling in love; and if she fell in love, it would not hurt her. Whatever is wrong with her, it can't be love.' Geraldine suddenly remembered that there certainly was something wrong with Melissa. Her tears the other day were very genuine.

Meanwhile, Clement Hope was going home with his mind and heart all aflame. The incidents of the day might seem unimportant to others; they consisted for the most part of a muddy walk round three sides of the Tower, and an introduction to a gentleman from America: but they seemed to Clement to promise a revolution in his whole conditions of being. He hardly found himself able to analyse his own emotions, to say what had become of old thoughts, and what was the meaning of the new ones that were coming up in their place. Clement really was what Mr. Aquitaine had described him, one of that class of mortals, very trying to all the world outside themselves, the poets who do not compose verses. His mind had for a long time been filled with his hopeless love for Melissa. Mr. Aquitaine had gauged very accurately the depth of his feelings on that subject. Melissa was the first pretty and graceful girl Clement ever had the chance of knowing, and he met her at a time when his fancy and his feelings were alike yearning for some one to fall in love with. A pretty servant-girl would almost have served his purpose if no more attractive woman had come in his way. Melissa's little rudenesses and saucy ways had naturally rather the effect of inflaming than chilling his love. He grew more and more into the conviction that she was the one being essential to his happiness, the one love for

his life. He honestly believed that he was in love with her, and that he never, never could be in love with any other woman on earth. This idea he had nursed and humoured so long that all the strength and sweetness of it came to be added to the self-delight and self-torment of imagined passion. He had no serious hope of marrying Melissa, and indeed, for the present, marriage was out of the question for him. Gratitude to the old man who had adopted him and made him a son rendered it impossible for Clement to think of taking any step in life which could have interfered with his home duties. Besides, to this young man, brought up modestly in the great northern seaport, the bare idea of his marrying a daughter of the house of Aquitaine seemed about as wild a fantasy as it would be, according to Major Pendennis, for young Arthur to dream of asking in marriage a daughter of one of the great houses into which his uncle kindly introduced him. Perhaps at this time of his life, and of his feelings also, it was rather gratifying than otherwise to Clement Hope to believe that he fed upon a hopeless passion. Despair is a great deal more soothing to the self-love of youth than hope. To believe one's self marked out by destiny for a ruined life tends very much to make the life itself pass pleasantly meanwhile. Clement was not conscious that he thus enjoyed his despair, but the enjoyment was there none the less.

In the midst of his conflict of emotions there rose upon his horizon the figure of Montana, as yet but a shadow to him. He heard of the great strange orator and leader from the new world, who was opening up an entirely fresh career to young men of promise and of soul. In a moment Clement became impressed with the conviction that under the banner of Montana it was his duty to rank himself. Aquitaine had put it well. Montana and his new colony became the Saracens and the Holy Land of Clement's disappointed imagination. A few centuries before he would have longed to buckle on his armour and make his way into Syria to fight the infidel and obtain, if Providence were only kind enough, the glory of a warrior's grave. Now it seemed a special dispensation on his behalf which brought into light Montana's scheme for a new commonwealth, and sent Montana himself right across our young hero's path. Over all this conflict between the past and the future there was shed a certain soft kindly light which, although Clement then hardly quite knew it, undoubtedly shone from Geraldine Rowan's sympathetic eyes.

He had been introduced to Montana. He had spoken with

the great man. The great man had taken kindly to him, and invited him to come and see him. The great man had looked at him fixedly, and Clement felt sure that Montana at that moment was putting him through a mental process of ordeal, subjecting him to a spiritual examination, just as a new recruit is tried by a physical test, and was examining into Clement's strength of soul, in order to decide whether he really was or was not a fitting disciple of the new movement. When, after this mental inspection, Montana spoke to him kindly and invited another meeting, Clement accepted the invitation as an acknowledgment that he was esteemed a welcome and a worthy recruit. Montana, indeed, had not been subjecting Clement to any such mental test; nor was he, after his usual fashion, engaged in thinking of something quite different while he looked fixedly at the person before him. He was thinking about Clement, because he was curiously attracted by him. He was puzzling himself to think what young man he could ever have known who seemed to look like Clement, and how it came about that the face, the figure, and the eyes were so familiar to him—that they seemed to have been part of his own youth. He ended by feeling pleased with Clement, and convinced that in him he would find a valuable follower, a companion full of faith and courage.

'Call for me on Sunday,' said Montana, as they were parting, 'and we will go together to the Church of Free Souls.'

Clement walked slowly home through the gathering evening. The evening was finer than the day had been, and the west was now glowing with all the richness that belongs to the sunset of a summer day that has been wet. Clement's road led him far from Piccadilly, whither he had conducted the young ladies to their home, and he walked all the way. It seemed to him as if he wanted all the time he could have for thought; for thinking over things, for thinking of himself and the new conditions that were growing around him, of his disappointment and of his hopes. In truth, our young, verseless poet was very happy, if he did but know it. Perhaps no possible success in life and ambition and love could make any man so happy as Clement Hope might now have been in his ideal disappointment and his ideal prospects. The very sunlight drew for him a softer colouring from his poetic love-pain and his poetic hopes. Sometimes he was for a moment dimly conscious, as he loitered along, that the clouds driven to the east and the fires of the west, the grass and flowers of the parks, and the ripple of the waters by which he

now and then had to pass, were steeped in a new and special beauty for him, which made his disappointment seem easy to bear, and made the form of Melissa Aquitaine show less distinct than it had been before. Although he did not then know it, one little star in his life's firmament was growing dimmer and dimmer, because another and a nearer and brighter, had now come up in the sky. Yes, that was a delightful, thoughtful walk home that evening for unhappy, very happy Clement Hope.

His way lay through Regent's Park; and he had to cross a bridge where once a certain Minola Grey, now Lady Heron, wife of the distinguished Colonial Governor, Sir Victor Heron, used to linger at quiet hours, when there were no loungers near. Clement stopped and leant on the railing of the bridge, and looked down on the ruffled water of the canal. The face and the eyes of Montana seemed to look up to him out of the darkening water. He could not tell what had put this odd idea into his head; but whenever he looked fixedly into the water he seemed to see Montana's eyes looking up to his own. The impression was uncomfortable, uncanny; and Clement went his way, anxious to get rid of it. He was a poetic youth; poets, even only *en herbe*, must have their odd fancies.

Clement was going home to the house of the kind old man whom he called his father. The livery-stable keeper had long since given up all manner of business, and settled with Clement in a house not far from Primrose Hill. The old man was rich enough, and, except for Clement, had nothing to do with his money. He was leading a blank, half-puzzled sort of life, growing every day more and more into the conviction that he was to see his lost son again; growing only more eager to see him with every year that intervened between the present and the past. Much as he was attached to Clement, yet Clement's presence seemed only to keep alive all the more the memory of his son and the longing to see him. Although he had adopted Clement, and the young man called him father, he had never asked Clement to take his name. He was Edmund Varlowe, old Edmund Varlowe now; and there was once a young Edmund Varlowe, and that was all. There could not be any young Edmund Varlowe but the one; so Clement Hope remained Clement Hope.

When he had crossed the bridge, Clement had not very far to walk before he reached Mr. Varlowe's house.

The house was an odd, old-fashioned building. It belonged, probably, in point of fact, to the early Georgian days, but it must

have had an old-fashioned look even when it was built. Not that it could have had the appearance of an imitation of some older fashion, some modern-antique, some affectation of revivalism. Such affectations did not prevail in the somewhat dull but very simple and straightforward days when its foundation-stone was laid. It was evidently one of those houses which have the peculiarity, as some girls have, of always looking old-fashioned even in their freshest days. If perchance some whim were to cause a revival of the precise period of the Georges to which this house belonged, the house itself would still look old-fashioned and even out of place beside the very neighbours which were supposed to reproduce the architectural peculiarities of its day. It was a solid block of a house, with rounded corners and two straight rows of windows above the ground-floor, the ground-floor itself only showing to the gazer's view a door with a semicircular fanlight. On the roof was a round turret, with a little dome-like cap on it and a weather-cock. This might be an observatory, or it might only have been the architect's idea of an ornament. The house stood alone, with a little patch of mournful-looking ground about it, and it was on the height of a gentle slope that drew back from the waters of the canal. There were many trees and much shrubbery in that region, to say nothing of the foliage of the adjoining park. One standing on the opposite bank, and looking across to the house, could sometimes, as it so happened, see no other human habitation whatever but this oddly constructed dwelling, and might fancy himself far away in the heart of the country, and gazing on some family mansion to which the owner was accustomed to travel down in the family carriage when the season for town was over, in the days when Mrs. Thrale was yet a saucy child, and before the 'Vanity of Human Wishes' had been written. It was well worth spending a few moments on the spot from which the house could thus be seen, if it were only for the curious effect produced by the sight of the dull old dwelling, the observatory, the weather-cock, the canal, the thick trees, and the absence of any hint of other human habitation. It did not tax the fancy of the gazer very much to suppose himself for the time transported not only out of London, but out of the century. When he had enjoyed that sensation long enough, he had only to walk a few paces either way, and he was in London and the nineteenth century again to his heart's content.

The effect was especially good when the evening began to fall. The house was one to be seen in the evening. There was a sug-

gestion of age and even of decay about it which suited with dun evening clouds and 'black vesper's pageants.' Why should not Clement Hope feel a new interest in such a scene, familiar as it was to him, and in the odd effect produced by such a house in such a neighbourhood? Clement was only too much given to the half-sensuous enjoyment of any idle fancy, and he had often a good deal of time to throw away on such harmless, indolent delight. He lingered this evening, and looked long at the house, and took up positions from which fresh picturesque effects were got, and studied the scene as if he had not looked on it before. At last he made quickly for the house, and when he came to its railings and gate he saw that Mr. Varlowe was walking in the front garden.

The livery-stable keeper was falling fast into years. His hair was long and massed about his head; the hair was perfectly white; his moustache and beard were white; but he had lost hardly anything of his dignity of bearing, and he only stooped occasionally when he happened to have been for some long time sitting in his chair. He walked usually upright, with a soldierly, resolute air, and shoulders squared, and might have been indeed a very statuesque figure but for that curious appearance about the legs which belongs to men the greater part of whose lives has been passed on horseback.

An odd sensation came over Clement as he opened the gate and saw the old man coming down the gravel walk. It was as if he had never seen Mr. Varlowe before, but suddenly began to be struck with the strange impression of a likeness to somebody he had seen elsewhere, and whose identity he could not now recall. Clement stopped in his walk up the garden, and looked with a curious half-puzzled air at the old man, exactly as one looks when caught by some impression of unexpected resemblance. The thought that passed across Clement's mind for the moment was that familiar thought, 'Surely I have seen that face, or something very like it, before,' and then the momentary confusion became all the more confused in the recollection of the fact that it was the face he had been seeing every day since his boyhood.

'You seem puzzled a bit, Clem, my boy,' Mr. Varlowe said; 'what has gone wrong with you?'

'Nothing, father,' said Clement; 'only, as I came up, I could not help thinking that I had seen some one lately who reminded me of you, and I think you now remind me of some one I have lately seen.'

'Like enough,' said the old man; 'a good many men of my age about London.'

'But not a good many of your figure and face.'

'Well, I don't know; there are some anyhow; and the fewer there are, the more likely you would be to notice anyone you chanced to see. But you have been a good long time away, Clem, and I have been mainly anxious about you now and then.' Mr. Varlowe still retained a good many of his northern peculiarities of speech.

'I have been meeting a wonderful man,' said Clement.

'Ay, ay? What is he like, now? and how does he come to be wonderful?'

'Well, he is a man who has a grand scheme for founding a new colony and beginning a new life out in America.'

'I don't believe much in those new schemes,' said the old man, gloomily; 'they seldom come to anything. What do you want leaving old England? Let her people stick to her, that's my idea. Let all people stick to their own soil while they can, Clem, my boy. Believe me, a man's never so happy as when he's at home.'

'But all men can't stick to their own soil,' said Clement, 'and some have no home to keep to.'

Mr. Varlowe looked at him anxiously. He sometimes began to be afraid that the young man's natural desire to see the world was oppressed by his confinement at home. 'You are not one of that sort, Clem, my boy,' he said; 'you have a home as long as you like to stay there.'

'Oh yes,' said Clement, hastily. 'I don't mean that. I was not thinking of myself. If everybody was as well off as I, there would be no use for new schemes and new colonies. But when you have been with a master-mind like Montana, you get to think very little of yourself, and your own ways, and your own emotions, and you begin to see that people ought to work for others, and think for others.'

'You think for others, I am sure,' said the old man; 'you don't think much for yourself; you always think for me.'

Clement felt a pang of remorse when he had to acknowledge to his own mind how small a part in his thoughts his fine old father had played for many and many an hour when compared with capricious little Melissa Aquitaine. This was the one secret he had not ever ventured on disclosing to Mr. Varlowe, and this he kept back only because he feared it would distress the old man by making him think that his adopted son must soon find new ties and new associations.

'Then, he is wonderful, this new man? Is he a lecturer or a preacher?'

'Well,' said Clement, 'he is a lecturer and a sort of preacher, but I have not heard him lecture or preach; it is the man himself who impresses me. I have only talked a few words with him, but they made me feel as if a new life ought to be opening out to me, and as if I ought to be doing something great. I don't mean,' he added quietly, 'that I ought to be doing something great myself, or that I could be doing anything better than I am doing, but that there is a higher purpose in life than one gets out of one's own small concerns. He is a man who makes one feel ashamed of troubling himself about passing and personal affairs.'

They were now walking up and down the gravel path. This was a favourite amusement of Mr. Varlowe. He liked to walk up and down in the evening, leaning on the shoulder of his young supporter; not that the strong straight figure seemed to need much support; and although our youth was of fair stature, he stood considerably shorter than the elder man, who leant on him with a kind of affectionate semblance of weakness requiring to be upheld.

There was certainly something about Clement's look to-day which still puzzled Mr. Varlowe. The boy did not seem quite himself, he thought; there were alternate lights and shades crossing his face, as if some vexation had its turn occasionally, and was then succeeded by a gleam of hope and of elated purpose. Mr. Varlowe had been so long a widower, and, never having had any daughters, had had so little to do with the affairs of women or their gossip, that it never occurred to him for a moment to think it possible Clement's trouble might have been caused by some daughter of Eve. Clement, to his mind, was still only a boy, although a tall and strong boy, and Mr. Varlowe never dreamed that the lad might be in love. But he could see well enough that something was troubling Clement, and he felt uncomfortable at the idea of anything being hidden from him.

'Something is the matter with you,' at last he said bluntly. 'You seem distressed somehow. You are taking something to heart. Come, out with it—there's a good fellow. Let me know. You don't want any money, do you?' for in his puzzled moment he could think of no trouble that could come to young men unless the want of money.

'No,' said Clement, smiling, 'I don't want any money; you always take care that I have enough of that. Indeed, nothing is the matter with me but that I have been talking to Mr.

Montana, and that he makes me feel rather ashamed of my life so far. I have been doing nothing. I think a man should have a purpose, even if he is not ambitious enough to want a career.'

'Never want a career!' said the old man with energy. 'Whatever you do, Clem, my dear boy, never want a career; never have anything to do with careers; careers are the ruin of boys. I know people who went Heaven knows where because they fancied they ought to have careers. Don't do it, Clem; I hate careers. Whatever we talk of, let's hear no more of that.'

CHAPTER XI.

'MUST NEEDS TO THE TOWER?'

It would be superfluous to say that Clement Hope did not fail to call on Mr. Montana at the appointed time. Montana lived in one of the Piccadilly hotels. He had a handsome suite of rooms there, and appeared to live, according to the familiar phrase, 'regardless of expense.' Outside his door, on the first floor, waited a negro serving-man who had once been a slave, and who had afterwards fought in a black regiment of which Montana volunteered to take the command. The negro asked Clement's name, and on hearing it instantly showed him into a large reception-room. There Clement saw a man who appeared to be servant or attendant of some kind, lounging in a listless sort of way near a window which looked on Piccadilly and the park. This man was much younger than the negro; he was, in fact, a lad of about twenty. He was of a complexion and style of feature new to Clement. He had a sallow, dark-greenish, oily complexion, and long, lank, streaky hair. Clement assumed that he was a foreigner of some kind, but ventured to address him in English. The young man replied in a kind of broken English, and with a sad, sickly smile, intended to suggest a welcome. He explained to Clement that Mr. Montana would come in a moment, and that Clement was meanwhile to wait. Then the attendant, or whatever he was, fell back into the window, listless as before.

Clement looked round the room. It was furnished, of course, in the usual style of a West-End hotel, but there were a good many appointments added which spoke of the individuality of its present occupant. There were masses of papers, English and foreign, blue-books, and reports, and one table was almost covered with unopened correspondence. On another table a sword was lying. Clement took it up, and with a sort of vague curiosity

drew it from its sheath. The sword was dinted in many places, and had engraved upon the blade the words 'Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Richmond.' Many architectural plans, drawings, and even models were scattered about. On a smaller table in a recess was a careless heap of watches, jewellery, chains, trinkets of all kinds, and money.

Montana came in while Clement still had the sword in his hand. Montana entered the room slowly, with his usual demeanour, as one rapt in a reverie or a dream. He did not look at Clement till he was quite close to him, and then his face lighted up with the sudden beaming smile which had fascination for so many of his admirers, and even went far to disarm his enemies. It seemed to have something special and personal in it. It seemed to say to the one on whom it lighted, 'You are the person I specially wished to see. You are the person whose coming was most needed at this moment to my purposes and my hopes.'

Clement's heart went out to meet this gracious smile. Montana held out his hand in a cordial fashion, and Clement pressed it almost with reverence. But, as Clement looked into Montana's eyes, the same kind of puzzled thought perplexed him which had seized him when he returned home that evening of which we have just spoken, and he saw Mr. Varlowe in his garden. 'Have I not seen a face very like this lately?' was the thought. It so occupied Clement for the moment as positively to interfere with the cordiality of his reply to the friendly greeting of the great leader.

Montana turned to the attendant and said a few words to him in a tongue which Clement not only could not understand, but which bore no resemblance to any language with which he had the least acquaintance.

'He is a Red Indian,' said Montana, 'an Indian of the plains; the Forest Indians, the noblest of the race, are gone. I brought him away from the territory which, by an odd chance, has the same name as myself. There was a massacre of the Indians in Montana, a massacre which they said was provoked by the Indians themselves, and I saved this lad. There was trouble in it, but I did not care. He is devoted to me. He goes about with me everywhere. I shall not have him long.'

'Why not?' asked Clement. He saw that Montana seemed to wait for a question.

'He will not live. He cannot live in civilisation. The life of cities is fatal to the Indian, and this lad was sickly from his birth. Anyhow, the Red Indian does not get on in what are

called civilised parts of the world, and the farther West you find him the less is he fit to breathe our fetid, unwholesome air.'

'But I suppose,' said Clement, 'you will take him with you to the new colony?'

'The new colony,' said Montana coldly, 'cannot be built or even begun in a day; in the meantime, I fancy my poor lad must die. But I don't see much to regret in that. I don't take the common view of death. If there is no purpose in life I see no use in remaining in it.'

Clement hastened to say that such was his own sentiment exactly.

'The man you saw at the door,' said Montana, 'I brought from down South. I got him away by what we used to call the "Underground Railway" in those days, an organisation by which we managed to enable slaves to escape into Canada or some very safe Northern State. He was with me for a while in the war. I happened to save his life once—there was no risk in it to a man of my views, because I then did not care whether I lived or not—but he chose to fancy he was mightily indebted to me, and he would not leave my service, I am sure, for a king's ransom. Well, let us not talk any more about myself, or yourself, or any individual man's trifling adventures.'

Clement felt it almost like a rebuke to be thus invited not to talk any more about himself. He had not said a word on that subject, and indeed had said very few words of any kind. But he greatly honoured the loftiness of the principle which Montana enunciated. What did it matter, truly, how men like himself, or even men like Montana, felt or acted, while there was a great cause in the air? Yet he was glad that in the few words Montana spoke there had been even a casual, and of course unconscious reference to Montana himself. It served to show what high purposes the great leader had, and what noble deeds of personal beneficence and bravery he must have accomplished. Then they talked about the Church of Free Souls, and the kind of work that was being done in the East End—work with which Montana professed much sympathy.

Montana moved towards the table where the letters stood, and placed a chair beside it for Clement, and invited him to sit. Montana himself sat on the other side, and took up some of the letters that were piled on the table. Begging Clement to excuse him, and not to consider himself in the way if he ventured to open some of them, Montana began to apply himself to the contents of a few.

Clement sat and listened and watched with devoted attention. He felt it a great thing to be thus admitted, as it were, to the private business life of the leader. Montana evidently treated him as one of a recognised band of followers, one admitted to know what the chief was doing, and even what he was thinking about. As he opened this or that letter he sometimes told Clement in a word or two what it was all about, and commented on its wisdom or its folly, its relevancy or its irrelevancy to the purposes he had in view. Suddenly Clement's eye fell upon the letter which lay next under Montana's hand. It was addressed to Montana in a woman's writing. Clement thought he surely could not be mistaken in that hand. Never, oh! never, had letter or line been addressed to him by that hand, and yet he had seen it often, and knew it well, and felt sure he could swear to it anywhere. The letter to Montana, he was satisfied, was addressed by the hand of Melissa Aquitaine. Probably it was some commonplace message, some ordinary invitation, some reminder of an engagement. Yet Clement would have longed to see any such missive addressed in that hand to him. For a moment all his old love flashed up within him again. He felt that his cheeks were growing red as he waited, with a nervous anxiety which he could hardly conceal, for the moment when Montana should take up the letter, open it, and read it. Luckily for him, Montana did not appear to observe his embarrassment. Perhaps Montana was not in the habit of observing much that did not directly concern himself. Another moment, and Montana had the letter in his hand. Hardly looking at the superscription, he broke the seal and took out the enclosure. Whatever its subject, the letter was not a brief invitation, or formal reply, or reminder of an engagement; it was not a lady's mere line or two of civil request to a friend. Pages of manuscript were contained in that envelope. Was it possible Melissa Aquitaine could ever have been influenced by any sense of duty to pen so long a letter? It was impossible, Clement felt inclined to think, knowing what he did of the girl, and through all his absurd affection for her being fully conscious of her weaknesses and her ways. Yet, as he saw the writing, which he could not help seeing, he could less and less doubt that it was the hand of Melissa Aquitaine.

Montana glanced at the letter and threw it on the table. 'There,' he said to Clement, 'is an illustration of one of our difficulties. We cannot work in a great scheme like ours without the help of women, and yet we are every moment reminded

how hard it is to work with them. Their emotions carry them so wildly away. I am for no scheme, in all my thought of the world's development, which does not keep women in their proper place, and make their impulsive natures subject to the discipline of man. They are great for work when they will do it, but they will follow any emotion, let it lead them where it will. This is a letter from a girl—she tells me she is a girl—who declares herself most anxious to aid hand and heart in our scheme, and yet, like a girl, she goes off in a moment into a rhapsody of affection, and devotion, and extravagant love, and all the rest of it.'

'Extravagant love!' The words went through Clement's heart. But if so, then it was not Melissa Aquitaine. He had been mistaken in the handwriting. 'Strange!' he said aloud, and feeling at the same time a keen pang to think that none of this evidence of woman's readiness to pour out her affection had ever yet found its way to him; to him who was so ready to receive it, so longing for it, come almost from where it might.

'Do you know the writer?' He held his breath for an answer.

'No,' said Montana coldly. 'I don't know the girl, but she tells me she will write again, and that she hopes some day to reveal herself to me. If I knew her, I would tell her not to reveal herself to me. I have no time for such correspondence as this, and I don't want to know the woman who can turn aside from a great path to waste her energy in silly outpourings of love. I always have a great deal of that sort of thing. Every man has who goes into any great movement. It is one of our difficulties. The girl is clever, apparently, but she wants discipline. You may read her letter, if you like,' and he tossed it over to Clement. 'There is nothing personal in that sort of thing. Emotional girls must be in love with somebody, and they must be exposing their love.'

Clement took the letter in his hand. He only glanced at a page and then put it quickly down, feeling as if he had done a mean act in even glancing at it, anonymous though it was. He could hardly have read it in any case. The characters swam and danced before him. Yet he saw enough to see that it was a wild outpouring of impassioned love, and frantic, almost servile devotion. The writer loaded Montana with words of affection and homage. There was love, love, love, repeated through every page. It never could be Melissa Aquitaine who wrote in this style; and yet Clement Hope felt it all but impossible to doubt that the writing he looked on came from Melissa Aquitaine's hand.

'There are women of a different kind,' said Montana, 'women who could assist us and be a tower of strength to us, and we want some such women just now.'

'You know of such women?' Clement asked half inarticulately.

He did not very well know what he said or why he said it. He wished to say something.

'I think I know of one. She hesitates a little yet, but she will not hesitate in the end. When work is appointed for men and women, the one for whom it is appointed must do it. Now,' said Montana, rising, 'we will go to the East End; I will show you the Church of Free Souls, and we will talk over our plans as we go. Do you like to walk?—'I am very fond of walking.'

'I am a great walker,' said Montana, 'and I don't care about a carriage when I can avoid it. I like to be no better than my neighbours.'

They set out for the Church of Free Souls. It was a long walk, and Montana talked a good deal more than was usual with him. He appeared to be pouring confidences into Clement's ears, and yet Clement did not seem to arrive at any particular knowledge of what he was going to do. He heard a great many maxims and phrases which for the time impressed him; and he saw Montana now and again recoil from some explanation, and seem to shelter himself in a sort of cavern of profound thought. In truth, it must be confessed that Clement remained, as regards Montana's general organisation and immediate purposes, about as wise as he had been before.

'You, at all events,' Montana suddenly said, 'will work with us. I knew that from the first.'

'I will work with you all I can,' Clement answered with some hesitation, fearing lest the answer might lower him in the leader's eyes; 'but I have told you of my father. I cannot leave him. I cannot go out with you just yet.'

'We are not going out just yet,' said Montana, 'nor could I ask you to disregard your father's wishes. You can help us here as well as there. The true follower can help anywhere. Above all things, you must have faith. You must trust in me and follow me. I may not yet be able to tell you all I mean to do. But you must believe in me, even if sometimes you have to follow me in darkness.'

Some words which the old livery-stable keeper had often read to him came involuntarily to Clement's mind: 'He who followeth Me shall not walk in darkness.' But he did not venture to apply them to the present hour and the present leadership,

and he thought it all right and proper that Montana should not reveal his whole scheme and organisation at once. Besides, this proposed reticence fully accounted for a certain previous vagueness in Montana's descriptions, and made darkness itself clear—that is to say, explained to Clement why Montana did not explain himself. The denial of a full confidence from the leader only made the follower's confidence all the fuller.

While leader and follower are on their way to the Church of Free Souls, we may say that that institution was a new church or temple which had suddenly arisen in London. It was not new in the sense of being a modern structure. Indeed, it was one of the very oldest buildings in the very old quarter where it stood. It had gone through many changes. It had been a Quakers' meeting-house, a Presbyterian place of worship, a corn-store, a music-hall or singing saloon, and now it was converted back again to something of its original purpose by becoming the Church of Free Souls. It was made all the more attractive to the curious from distant parts because it was so difficult to get at. It stood in one of those mazes of little streets which run off Tower Hill, and from which every now and then you get glimpses of the round-topped turrets and weather-cocks of the Tower itself, with occasionally, on a clear day, a flash of the Thames and of the Pool below. The Church of Free Souls had been for some time in the occupation of a sect of very advanced Dissenters verging on to freethought. Under their rule it had, however, its regular forms of worship, not unlike those of any other Nonconformist chapel. But suddenly it had passed into the care of a minister who had wandered forth from the Church of England itself, on and on, away and away, into extreme freedom of opinion.

Under his inspiration the Church of Free Souls grew into existence. He was an eloquent man, had been a very fashionable preacher in the West End in his time, and the mere fact of his having migrated thus far eastward, and settled himself in the midst of the Minories, and almost under the shadow of the Tower, would have been enough to lend attraction to a new ministration, and to draw a crowd.

Gradually crowds were drawn to the Sunday services, and at certain times it was difficult indeed to get a seat there. There were no pews or divisions or inequalities of any kind. It was a question of first come, first served. You sat down where you could; you paid nothing for your seat, and might give to the collection afterwards if you felt inclined, or abstain from giving if your sympathies did not take a practical form. The church was now

handsomely painted and decorated inside, and was hung with pictures, not professing any great accuracy as likenesses, to represent all the eminent religious persons of all the creeds in the world, except the orthodox. There were Zoroaster, whose portrait we may suppose to have been a fancy likeness, and Confucius and Socrates and Mahomet, and John of Leyden, and Hypatia and Joanna Southcote, and many other leaders of sects or peoples, and eminent public men and women who had supported new movements of various kinds. The doctrine taught in the Church of Free Souls was distinctly eclectic in its nature. It was in some sort a principle of religious averages. It assumed a certain portion of truth and a great deal of philosophy in all faiths everywhere, and it struck a kind of average, and so got, or professed to get, a certain profit out of all together. The preacher usually declined to offer any set opinions of his own, and simply called attention to the 'flower of good,' according to his own habitual expression, which 'blossomed in every free faith.' He was impartial, and disdained to attribute any superiority to one over another. On the other hand, he positively declined to see any particular advantage in any of them, but, culling some leaves from every plant, he offered them to his congregation that they might infuse all together, if they thought fit, and so make a sweet kind of syrup of their own brewing for the nourishment of the soul.

The minister in charge of this temple was as liberal with his pulpit, or we should say his platform—for he disclaimed and contemned the use of a pulpit—as he was with his religious opinions. He offered the advantages of an audience and a platform in his temple to any remarkable person who came in the way and desired an opportunity of addressing such a crowd. Many an eminent stranger, who in his own country would as little have expected to be invited to address a congregation as to figure on the tight-rope, found himself, on arriving in London, favoured with a graceful invitation to communicate some thoughts on spiritual matters to a yearning congregation desirous for all forms and moods of truth in the Church of Free Souls, near Tower Hill. The audience that gathered there were naturally eclectic, not to say motley, in their constitution, as were the doctrines to which they came to listen. Great ladies from the West End came in their carriages, and were interested in the whole affair almost as much as if it were Hurlingham or the Zoological Gardens. Strangers of almost all sorts came, regarding the church as one of the sights of London which ought to be seen. It had been described over and over again by the correspondents

of all the American papers from New York to San Francisco. Numbers of eager-eyed mechanics from the East End came and sat there and listened earnestly, hoping to hear something which might fill them with better and brighter views of life than those which they could evolve from their own dull, hard daily experience. Young men and young women from a class just one degree above that of the artisan; young men and young women who assisted probably in the poorer kind of shops, and who were noticed among their fellows for their sober ways and the intense anxiety with which they looked at all the problems of life; these formed a goodly part of each Sunday's congregation. Some deeply thinking men and women came there with a faint hope that they were about to hear something which really might open on them a new view of the relations of life, and they went away for the most part disappointed.

It was a long way to the Church of Free Souls. Clement had not been there before, but he remembered having seen Montana come to meet them when the girls and he were walking round the Tower garden, and it did not seem to him now that Montana was taking the shortest way to bring them to the place. At least, Montana now certainly brought Clement on to Tower Hill by a way which appeared to Clement to take them a little out of their road, and which did afterwards in fact oblige them to retrace their steps. When they came to Tower Hill, Montana crossed the road to the path round the railings, and there began to pace slowly along with Clement, very much as Clement had done with Geraldine and Miss Marion on the memorable day when he first saw Montana. Not many days had passed since that day, and yet it seemed to Clement that already an entirely new chapter had opened in his life. They walked round and round by the railings, Montana talking sometimes in his vague oracular way, and sometimes remaining silent for several minutes.

Suddenly Montana said, without looking at Clement, and talking as if he were communing with himself:

'Yes, there are women who could assist a work such as mine.' Then, looking round at Clement, he asked: 'Have you known Miss Rowan long?'

There was a tone of unwonted eagerness, or at least something remotely approaching to eagerness, in the question, which was unlike Montana's usual way of speaking.

'Oh no,' said Clement, and he felt that his colour was deepening; 'I saw her for the first time within the last few days.'

'But you have known Miss Aquitaine for some time?'

Clement had much difficulty in keeping an unembarrassed manner when he answered that he had known Miss Aquitaine and her father for a long time.

'She has not the same force of character,' said Montana. 'She is not a woman to create a career for a man. But perhaps you think she is?' he suddenly said, changing his tone, and looking at Clement with a not unkindly smile.

'No,' said Clement, with a sudden earnestness which was forced from him, 'I don't think anything of the kind.'

He did not, indeed, think so any more.

'Come,' said Montana, 'it is time for us to go to the Church of Free Souls. It is not far from this;' and they went their way at once, and no other word was spoken until they reached the place.

CHAPTER XII.

'THE DESIRE OF THE MOTH FOR THE STAR.'

How was it with Melissa Aquitaine when an air ground out on a barrel-organ could bring tears into her eyes—she who had never been supposed to know one touch of sentiment? The air that now moved her thus, and made her put down her pen as she sat writing in her room, was not a dirge, or a sad appealing hymn, or a piece of melancholy music of any kind. It was the air of a comic song, a vulgar music-hall song. We are strangely apt to fancy that melancholy sensations are wrought only by music that is melancholy. To the vast majority of people, the feeling the music inspires is far more often one of association than of art. Something suggested by the air, some connection which is in our memory with past time or a lost friend it is, and not the nature of the strain, which touches our heart, and strikes 'the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound.' The village lad enlists and goes to the war, and is killed, and his sweetheart is made melancholy for years after by the first sound of 'Tommy, make room for your uncle,' on the barrel-organ, because he used to whistle it, and he is dead. The young wife who died long ago used to amuse her husband by rattling off on the piano the inspiring notes of 'Champagne Charley,' and the Charley of that day, now grown a middle-aged man, is made instantly melancholy by the sound of that ridiculous air, although he could hear without outward sign of emotion the most devotional passage of the sublimest oratorio, or the soul-piercing pathos of 'Che faro senza Eurydice.' It so happened that a common music-hall

ballad now touched Melissa's heart and made her eyes wet. It was some ballad that she suddenly remembered having heard her nurse sing for her in days long ago, days that now seemed to her long ago, when she was still a child; days not particularly delightful or romantic in themselves; but still, days when nothing troubled her; and now something was troubling her. She used to be a disagreeable little child enough in those days; and the possibility that she had been so began now to occur to her somehow. She began to doubt whether she had been exactly all that she might have been to those around her. New feelings coming up within her were beginning dimly to reveal to her the possibility of other people having feelings too—a matter which had not previously occurred to her mind. She was unhappy, poor little girl; and the air she heard grinding itself out on the barrel-organ spoke to her of a time when she never thought of either herself or anyone else being unhappy. So she put down her pen for a few moments and felt the tears come into her eyes.

'What a fool I am!' she said bitterly and aloud, and she went on with her writing again. She wrote in a hurried way, rapid by fits and starts, and then stopping for a long time to think over what she was to say next, and tearing up a great deal of what she wrote, and thrusting the torn scraps into the pocket of her dress, as if she would not have even those fragments seen of common eye. She was so much absorbed in her work that she did not hear the sound of a quick, light tap at the door, and then the opening of the door itself. Her father quietly entered the room. As she had not heard him, he would now surprise her by his coming. He stole behind her chair and put both his hands over her eyes.

Melissa cried out at once: 'Papa!'

'How did you know it was I?' Mr. Aquitaine asked, setting Melissa's eyes free to look out upon the world, which they did at that moment with a somewhat startled expression.

'Oh, I knew the touch of your hands very well; and besides, there was nobody else who would come in such a way.'

She did not seem, he thought, as glad to welcome him as he usually found her, and she hurriedly shut up the blotting-book in which she had been writing.

'What have you been doing, Mel?' he asked, after giving her a loving kiss.

'Oh, nothing, dear,' she said; 'nothing.'

'Something, surely. What have you got in your book? What have you been writing?'

She got up petulantly, opened the book, took a sheet of paper out, and began to tear it in pieces. Mr. Aquitaine was looking on with perfect good-humour, and did not even appear to notice the anger that was in her face.

'I do believe, Mel,' he said, 'you have taken to writing poetry. Come, confess you were trying your hand at verses; do let me have a look.'

'No,' said Melissa, still with an embarrassed air, 'I was not writing poetry. I can't write poetry. I can't write anything worth looking at.'

'An essay on woman's rights, perhaps? I should like very much to have a look at it.'

'You know I don't care about woman's rights,' said Melissa, 'or woman's wrongs either.'

'Well, I never thought you did much; but one doesn't know what may have come about lately under the guidance of Mr. Montana.'

Melissa looked up at him, a sudden light of wonder in her eyes, and then she looked down again.

'No,' she said, 'I have not advanced in woman's rights any farther than I was.'

'Then,' said Aquitaine, 'it must be a novel. You are beginning a novel. It is something or other about which you don't feel quite certain, and you are afraid to have it seen by anyone while it is yet a project. Never mind, girl; I know they say children and fools should never look at unfinished work, and so I shan't ask to look at yours. But I have no doubt it will be something remarkable when it does come out. Only, if it is going to be a very long piece of work, don't you know, Melissa, I think you'll never finish it.'

'Do you think I am meant for the early and silent tomb?' said Melissa, with an attempt to be lively.

'No, not a bit of it; but I think you are a very lazy and capricious little girl, and that whatever you begin you certainly won't finish, if it is to be more than a page. If that were a letter, now—I dare say you could finish a letter, provided it were not too long; but I despair of your ever getting as far as the middle of the first volume of a romance. Besides, I don't know what you would do for a hero. I don't believe anybody is a hero in your eyes, not even I myself, Mel. Come, confess you don't think me an heroic figure.'

'Girls don't want heroic figures for their fathers,' said Melissa.

'No, I suppose they don't. It would be rather uncomfort-

able to have an elderly hero always hanging about the house, would it not? But you have a hero, then, for your love romance?'

'I am not doing any love romance,' said Melissa. 'How can you be so tiresome?'

'Very well, girl, let it be,' said the good-natured Aquitaine: 'just now I want you to do some less attractive business; I want you to come with me and make one or two calls.'

Melissa moved uneasily about the room, and still seemed distressed as to the fate of the torn paper which she held crumpled in her hand.

'You haven't got a waste-paper basket,' said Aquitaine, 'and don't know what to do with your rejected MS. My dear, you must start a waste-paper basket instantly if you are going in for the business of writing; you will find nothing so important as the waste-paper basket, and it will be just as well you should fill it yourself in anticipation, and so save the editors and publishers the trouble; they will do it if you don't.'

'I haven't a waste-paper basket, and there isn't a fire, and the thing is neither worth destroying nor keeping.' Nevertheless, she did not throw away the paper that she held in her hand. 'Very well, dear,' she said; 'if we are to go out, I shall be ready in a moment.'

'In a moment!' Mr. Aquitaine echoed. 'Quite so; I will read a few of the newspapers. I have not begun them this morning, and your moment will give me time for a good steady read through the lot of them.' He took a newspaper and settled himself down. Melissa meanwhile crept out of the room in the quietest way, eager to get to her own chamber.

Mr. Aquitaine was too unsuspicious a man to be roused to any sense of distrust, even by the girl's evident embarrassment. He took it for granted that she had been writing some letter which she did not care to finish when once she was interrupted, and he did not really fancy that she was starting on the business of authorship. A man more keen-eyed than he might have thought that there was something in the girl's evident determination not to part with the torn paper she held in her hand. But even if Aquitaine had suspected what she was doing, or had insisted on seeing the paper, it is not likely that much change would have been made in the conditions with which this story has to deal. Melissa was a resolute little person, sure to have her own way in the end, and to walk whatever road she marked out for herself, no matter to what goal it conducted.

On her rapid way upstairs Melissa literally ran against Geral-

dine Rowan. Her excitement and agitation did not escape Miss Rowan's notice.

'Whither are you flying, and what have you got in your hand, you breathless child?' Geraldine said, playfully holding the girl; 'what torn document is that?'

'I don't know,' said Melissa, 'and I don't care. I wish everyone would not frighten and torment me. What is it to anybody what I write or whom I write to? I am not sending it, anyhow —there!' and she tore the paper into scraps ever so much more minute than she had done in her first excitement, and then she burst into tears.

'Something is going terribly wrong with you, my dear little girl,' Geraldine said; 'and I am a very determined friend, Melissa, when I want to be a friend at all. Come to my room, or I will go to yours: let us talk for a moment or two. I will not ask you to tell me anything if you don't wish; but if you could at all bring yourself to make me your confidante, I think it would be good for you. I am a very faithful friend, and I know that something is troubling you lately and that you want to conceal it. Why don't you speak to your father?'

Melissa was now allowing herself to be led quietly along the passage towards Geraldine's room. She made no answer, and was only trying to prevent her sobs from being heard. They got into the room, and Geraldine carefully closed the door.

'Why not speak to Mr. Aquitaine, Melissa?' she said; 'he seems to me to be the best of fathers and the best of good companions. I should tell anything to such a man if I were you.'

'I have nothing to tell,' Melissa murmured, still making a feeble effort to keep up her defiant manner.

'But such a change has been coming over you that everybody can see—everybody, I think, but Mr. Aquitaine; people never notice their own family. Girls don't burst into tears at being asked what they have written without some reason for it. Besides, I can see that something is distressing you. Will you tell Mr. Aquitaine, or will you let me ask Captain Marion to speak to him?'

'No,' said Melissa, 'nobody shall speak about me to anybody. I don't choose to be spoken about. If I have anything to tell I will tell it myself, but I could not talk to my father about it, Geraldine. How can you speak in such a way? I cannot talk to him. I cannot talk to anybody about it.'

'Then there is something!' said Geraldine quietly.

'Oh, of course there is, if you will have it, if you will insist

upon it. Of course I know you have been wondering about this for ever so long. Well, there *is* something. I am a very silly girl, that everybody knows; and I have been making myself more silly of late than I do believe even Providence intended to make me. Look here—yes, I think you are a true friend, and I like you—or, I don't hate you; not more, at least, than I hate most people, as I do. I don't like you, perhaps, although I said I did just now; still, I don't hate you more than I hate everybody. I like you better than the rest of them, than—I don't know what. Yes, I will tell you. I have been——' Then she stopped. She looked curiously into Geraldine's face, and said: 'I wonder what you will think of me when I tell you? and I wonder what a girl like you, with a well-regulated mind, is likely to say?'

'But, Melissa,' said Geraldine, 'I have not a well-regulated mind; I am always so impulsive, so foolish, and speaking out my mind too freely; and talking to everybody as though I were his, her, and their friend, and altogether comporting myself in the most gushing manner. I am not at all a girl of a well-regulated mind. Sydney Marion is, if you come to that. She has a well-regulated mind, but I should not expect you to rush into confidence with her. I rather appeal to you by virtue of the sacred bond of sisterhood of the ill-regulated.'

Geraldine was endeavouring to make the matter as light and easy as she could.

'Well, then,' said Melissa, 'I am in love; that's all.'

'I thought as much; but is that all?'

'No, that is not all,' said Melissa, 'if you will have it: I am in love with a man, and I have told him so.'

'You have not written to him to tell him so?' said Geraldine.

'Haven't I, though?' Melissa asked, growing defiant and saucy in her despair. 'You bet, as all you Americans say—don't they all say "you bet"?—well, then, you bet I have; yes, I wrote and told him so.'

CHAPTER XIII.

ELECTIVE AFFINITIES.

There was silence between the two girls for a moment or two after Melissa had made her revelation. The dusk of evening was gathering; the air was soft; Geraldine's windows were open; the footfall of passengers echoed along the street; and the sound of the barrel-organ, which had touched Melissa's sensi-

bility not long before, was still heard in the room, 'faint from farther distance borne.' Geraldine could hear distinctly the beating of Melissa's heart, as she sat close to the troubled girl. She could also hear the faint ticking of the pretty little clock that stood on the chimney-piece; and an odd whimsical fancy came into her head that the little pit-pat of the pendulum ought to represent the beating of the absent lover's heart, keeping time and tune to the throbs of Melissa's enamoured bosom. Geraldine assumed that it was an ordinary love affair, but that perhaps the youth required some little direct encouragement from the maiden. She was conscious even then, and she remembered it well afterwards, of a certain sense of relief in the knowledge that it was not Clement Hope on whom Melissa's uncontrollable affections were fixed. 'She would never do for him,' Geraldine thought; 'she hasn't soul enough; she's too petulant; she couldn't make him happy.'

Geraldine was sorry for Melissa and angry with her too. But she was not at first much alarmed by Melissa's disclosure. It did not occur to her to think who the person could be to whom Melissa had made her confession of love, and she was more inclined to be amused than shocked.

'Is this anyone,' she asked, 'whom your father would like?'

'I don't know,' said Melissa coldly. 'I have not consulted my father.'

'But won't your father expect to be consulted?'

'I don't think my father would care to be consulted about his daughter making a fool of herself and writing a silly letter to a man.'

'But the man will answer the letter, won't he? He must speak to your father or to you.'

'He won't answer my letter,' Melissa composedly answered, 'because he doesn't know my name.'

'Oh—then you didn't sign it? You didn't write in your own name?'

'No,' Melissa answered in a dismal tone, 'I did not get so far as that—but I dare say I shall some day.'

'Well, you are a very dreadful little girl, Melissa, and that is the truth of it. I hope you won't get so far as you say. I hope you will be content with your anonymous outpouring of homage. But I should like to know who the man is, if I might—if you don't mind telling me; and I think, as you have trusted me so far, you might trust me a little farther perhaps.'

'What good will it do you to know?'

'Well—only this, that I think I could better judge whether this humour is likely to last with you or not, and whether *he* is likely to find out his mysterious admirer, and whether it would matter if he did. Is he a very young man?'—'No.'

'He is not a very old man, I suppose?'

'No; he is not old, and he is not young, and he might be any age. I wish I had never seen him. No, I don't—I'd rather not have lived than not see him.'

Geraldine really began to think from the girl's manner that things were looking serious. 'Have I ever seen him?' she asked.

'You go on,' said Melissa, 'as if this was a game of Twenty Questions; and it isn't. Yes—you have seen him; and he has seen you; and I wish he had not.'

'Why do you wish that?' asked Geraldine, astonished.

'"Demetrius loves your fair,"' said Melissa, '"oh happy fair!"' With all her ignorance and her indifference to reading, Melissa, as we have already seen, had a little knack of picking up a Shakespearian quotation and employing it prettily enough.

'This is mysterious,' Geraldine said. 'Well, if I had any influence over him, I am sure I would make him over to you with all my heart. But I cannot imagine who he is; we know so very few men—I mean, you and I know so very few together. I know it isn't Mr. Hope, and I know it isn't Mr. Fanshawe.'

'Stuff!' said Melissa contemptuously. 'Think of Mr. Fanshawe!'

'Well, I do think of Mr. Fanshawe; I think very kindly of him, but I know it is not he—I suppose it isn't Captain Marion?'

'Not likely!' said Melissa.

'Then, I give him up,' said Geraldine, 'and there's an end of it; for I have gone through all our list of acquaintances.'

Melissa's face bore such an expression of surprise, and something like contempt, that a light seemed to come from her into Geraldine's mind.

'Melissa,' she said, 'you don't mean Mr. Montana?'

'Don't I, though?' Melissa replied. 'But I just do. I am in love with him; madly in love with him, if you like—there! I have told you all. Laugh at me if you please, or scold me, or pity me; it is true all the same; I am glad I have told you; I must have told somebody, or I should have screamed it out in the night. I have written him love-letters—grovelled before him. Oh! what will he think of me if ever he finds out?'

'But he must never find it out,' said Geraldine. She had turned pale; the thing was serious.

'Oh, he will find it out,' said Melissa. 'Some day I shall betray myself; I cannot help it. I wish I had been a better girl. I wish I had learnt to think more of what people say—and all that! I wish I cared for saying prayers—and—and that sort of thing.' Poor Melissa did not mean to speak irreverently; but her turn of expression was touching in the very simplicity of its irreverence. She could think of no other words at the time.

'Prayers and that sort of thing!' said Geraldine, horror-stricken.

'Yes, anything you like. I suppose you can pray? My mother does not care about prayers, and that sort of thing. She never did. My father is too busy—I suppose men don't pray. Anyhow, I wish I were like another girl. Oh, how I wish I were like you, for one reason above all others!'

'I don't know any reason,' said Geraldine. 'I haven't a father, and I haven't a home.'

'No,' said Melissa, standing up and clenching her little hands; 'you have not. But Mr. Montana cares about you a hundred thousand times more than he ever did or will care about me—that I know.'

Geraldine was really pained by these wild words. She was deeply sorry for Melissa; but now there began to mingle with her concern for Melissa a certain vague undefinable sense of alarm about herself. Mr. Montana's manner had from the first been unwelcome to her; and if others saw it as well as she, if others had the same impression forced upon them, if a girl like Melissa could see it, how distressing it must be to be brought continually into a sort of companionship with Montana! Always there had seemed something ominous to Geraldine in her relationship with him. She was not afraid of him as others were, or impressed by him and his strange manners and his singular beauty. But there was something uncanny in the way in which his shadow seemed always to be thrown across her path. Her first thought on hearing Melissa's words was a longing to go away somewhere, anywhere, out of Montana's range; and then came back to her the more reasonable thought that she had much better stay where she was and try to help Melissa out of her difficulty, and if possible help her to cure herself of her foolish passion. She went to work resolutely to reason with the girl, but did not seem to make much impression.

'Let me alone,' said Melissa at last; 'advising is never any good with me, nor arguing, nor scolding. It was always my way, the more I was pressed not to do a thing the more I wanted to do it. You can't keep me back, Geraldine, from doing any-

thing that comes into my mind. I could not keep myself back. I will try to keep out of this scrape as long as I can, but some day I shall tell him all this one way or another. I shall either write it or I shall speak it. I shall not be able to keep it in; and I suppose he will rebuke me and preach me a sermon and tell my father all about it, and Captain Marion will shake his head over me and think what a bad girl I am, and what good girls his daughters are—although I don't know that, either; I fancy one of them, at all events, is nearly as far gone as I am myself. But anyhow you will all be ashamed of me, and I shall be ashamed of myself. But I am in love with him all the same, and he must come to know it, and that's all about it.'

There was not much use in saying more on the matter just then. Melissa's words about Montana, and her hints about some one else as well as herself, made Geraldine unwilling to mention his name again.

'Now I hope I have shocked you enough for once,' Melissa said coldly, 'and I'll go. I had better get the redness out of my eyes, hadn't I, before dinner? You can tell on me, Geraldine, if you like; you can tell my father, or Captain Marion, or Sydney, or anybody. I should fancy it would be the duty of a good girl to tell such a thing to a wicked girl's parents, but I am not a great authority on the subject. Do as you like; I don't much care.'

'You dreadful little thing! you know I'll not betray you,' Geraldine answered. 'I don't know that I am not doing wrong; I don't know that I ought not to tell your father; but I won't. You trusted me, and I'll keep to my trust. But oh, my poor child, how I wish you would speak to your father. Oh, when I had a father——'

'Yes,' Melissa said, 'I dare say!' She was going away scornfully; but something in Geraldine's expression seemed to strike her. She turned back and took Geraldine's hand gently, and asked in a low tone, 'Will you kiss me, Geraldine?'

Geraldine took the little palpitating girl in her arms and kissed her.

Montana was a constant visitor at Captain Marion's house. He never missed a day. He came and went when he pleased. Sometimes, but not often, he dined and met people there; his habit, however, was to come in early in the day and before any ordinary visitor was likely to arrive. He was a good deal with Captain Marion, who still remained under the impression that he was getting to know all about Montana's schemes. He

hardly ever failed to look into the drawing-room and see some of the young ladies. With all Captain Marion's admiration and reverence for his friend and possible leader, he could not help feeling that Montana's visits had strangely changed the atmosphere of the house. He was always glad to see Montana; and the singular fascination with which Montana had impressed him from the first in nowise diminished, but rather increased, from the frequency of their intercourse. But Captain Marion could have wished sometimes that the women were out of the way. Montana's coming and going acted strangely upon all of them. Katherine admired him in the most open way, flattered him, hung upon his utterances—followed him about, one might say, almost like some faithful animal clinging to his master's heels. Captain Marion did not like this. It puzzled him; it sometimes irritated him. His soft, affectionate, unsuspicious ways did not allow him to think that Katherine was trying to get up a flirtation with the prophet and leader, and indeed Montana's position of prophet and leader made it easy for women to offer any adulation to him without suggestion of levity. Yet Marion did not like to see his daughter thus openly devoted to Montana. He thought there was something at least unladylike, not to say unwomanly, about it. He wondered Trescoe did not notice it; was sometimes glad he did not notice it, and sometimes thought it rather weak and silly that Trescoe did not see it and talk to her seriously and put a stop to it. On the other hand, the coming of Montana either sent Miss Rowan out of the room or condemned her to absolute silence. She clearly disliked and distrusted Montana as much as Captain Marion's younger daughter believed in him and adored him. This, too, made Captain Marion uncomfortable. He was very much attached to Miss Rowan. He was always happy to have her near him. He would have wished her to like everything he liked, to love all that he loved, to have the same tastes, inclinations, and tendencies as he had. It distressed him to find that she shrank from Montana so openly, and to all appearance disliked him so much. He wondered that Montana was not repelled by it. He was afraid sometimes that Miss Rowan's manners might lead Montana to come less often.

Again and again Marion was on the point of remonstrating with both young women — with Geraldine for her repelling manner to Montana, and with Mrs. Trescoe for her too open admiration. Then, he could not but observe with pain the strange ways of Melissa Aquitaine, about whom he felt an

almost greater sense of responsibility than if she had actually been his daughter. Her whole nature seemed changed since Montana came above the horizon of their little world. She crept into corners when he was there, and scarcely spoke, but started or grew pale, or looked angry or alarmed according as others spoke and he spoke to them. She who had been such an audacious, outspoken, pert little chatterbox was sometimes changed into a melancholy, bitter, broken-down creature. How Montana failed to notice that something was amiss with the little girl whenever he came into the room Captain Marion failed to understand. Marion himself was anything but an observant man. His sympathies and not his observation guided him in this instance. When he cared about anybody, man or woman, he was sure to observe that person's movements closely and kindly, and thus it was that he came to notice the strange ways of his old friend's only daughter. But Montana, who had keen observation when he chose, had no such sympathies to guide him, and he hardly ever noticed the little girl whose odd ways disturbed Captain Marion. To make matters worse, Katherine was always saying spiteful little things to her father about Melissa, and suggesting that Melissa was madly in love with Montana and was making an exhibition of herself.

One day Marion lost patience a little.

'I tell you what, Katherine,' he said, 'I don't think little Melissa is the only woman in this house who sometimes makes an exhibition of herself. I think if I were you I wouldn't show such awful admiration for Montana.'

Katherine got red and looked angry, but concealed her anger.

'Why, papa,' she said, 'you are awfully fond of him—you adore him. I like to do whatever you do.'

Marion smiled in spite of himself at the absurdity of the answer.

'That's all very well, Katherine,' he said, 'for me; but for a young woman to go on showing such admiration is quite another thing. I wonder how Trescoe likes it.'

'But Frank doesn't care a bit,' said Katherine. 'He knows it's all right.'

'Yes, yes, of course, we all know it's all right,' said Marion; 'but, my dear, don't you think it would be better to be a little more reserved? I don't wonder at your admiring Montana. He is a man that everyone must admire—at least, almost everyone,' he hastily added, for he remembered how Miss Rowan did not seem quite to admire him. 'But then, you know, I think

it would be more ladylike to be a little more reserved. After all, Montana is not an old man. He is still what would be called young, and he looks younger than he really is, and he is very handsome.'

'But then, you know, papa,' said Katherine, 'one does not think of him as one does of other men; nobody thinks of flirting with him. I am sure I don't; I am sure I should not have the courage. One might as soon think of flirting with John of Leyden or with some saint.'

Marion said no more, but he observed that the adulation went on as much as ever, and that it did not seem to be just the sort of adulation which a woman offers to a John of Leyden or to a saint. However, he was sure there was nothing amiss with Katherine, he said to himself, and Montana was the safest of men.

Montana never for a moment put on the manner of one who flirts with women, or is conscious that they are trying to flirt with him. His manner was just the same to men and women whom he liked. Evidently, Marion thought, he did not like Miss Rowan. He seldom spoke to her, although Marion noticed that he often fixed his eyes on her.

Another little trouble to sweet-tempered Captain Marion was the growing melancholy of his daughter Sydney. Young Fanshawe came very often, and was intensely devoted to Miss Rowan.

He was very friendly with Sydney, as he was with Melissa, but he showed an undisguised devotion to Geraldine. She talked to him and went about with him as freely almost as if he had been her brother. It sometimes happened that poor Sydney was thrown a little into the shade—was left, as it were, in a corner by herself. Once or twice, when Clement Hope called after their walk to the Tower, she caught herself wishing that he would come very often, and thinking what a very handsome young man he was, and how like a picture, and how sweet and tender his ways were, and how very delicious it would be if he were only to be a little friendly and companionlike with her, and talk with her in a recess of the room as somebody was always talking with Geraldine. But then, again, would come the reflection into Sydney's mind that most assuredly if Clement came often he would devote himself either to Melissa or to Geraldine, and that she would be left out in the cold just the same as before.

Captain Marion could not help seeing that Sydney was depressed and dull sometimes, and that something was wrong with her. He often thought he noticed, with peculiar pain, that there was a certain coldness in her manner towards himself, and

that her affection was much less demonstrative than it had ever been, although at no time had she the demonstrative ways of Katherine. This puzzled as well as pained him. None of the talk had reached his ears which had sometimes come to those of his daughter. He did not remember that he was still a clever, handsome, attractive man, little past the prime of life as yet, with plenty of money, and that in his house, apparently on the most familiar and affectionate terms with him, and more so with him than with any other of his family, was a young, bright, and handsome girl who was believed to be poor, and who had all the world before her to make a way of living for herself. It never occurred to Captain Marion that a good many people were likely enough to assume, as Mrs. Aquitaine had long since assumed, that Sydney Marion would soon have a young stepmother.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CRISIS.

The wrecks come to the shore. The shore is not expected to go out and meet the wrecks. Sometimes, badly off as the wrecks already are, it might be better for them if they did not come to the shore. The shore only batters them a little more than the sea had done. We do not know whether Montana could be fairly likened to a shore in the good sense or the bad, but certainly a good many wrecks came to him during his London visit. Wrecks of projects, wrecks of ideas, of hopes, of philanthropic schemes, of conspiracies—wrecks of men and of women constantly drifted to him. There was hardly a broken-down inventor, projector, or dreamer in London who did not seek him out and endeavour to get a new charter of hope from his helping hand. Men who believed in nothing sought him out in order that they might be confirmed in their unbelief. The visionaries who had plans for bringing all the world to instant peace, the men who had discovered the means whereby war might be brought to an end through the virtue of some invention so destructive that whole armies and fleets disappeared at a touch, the men who had a scheme for the foundation of one universal religion and brotherhood of nations—all these came to him.

Montana employed several secretaries, and they were kept busy all day long in opening and answering his letters. He made it a point of principle or of honour to answer every letter if he could. Not a few of his correspondents were evidently writers whom the world called mad men or mad women, but still, when a letter

was not anonymous, he endeavoured to give it some sort of reply. Happily for him, a considerable percentage of his writers were anonymous, and so much time at least was saved to him and to his staff. He continued to receive pretty regularly the effusions in the handwriting which had sent a cold shiver through the veins of Clement Hope. He hardly read them. He glanced at them just closely enough to see that they were of the same kind, breathing the same hysterical passion of girlish adoration and love. They had absolutely no effect upon Montana. The invitations to assist a new discoverer of perpetual motion had quite as much interest for him. Not all those who sought Montana were wrecks. Stately galleons floating safely to port, tall ammirals proud in their strength, gilded galleys with silken sails—these sought him out too. It became a matter of competition amongst the aristocratic to secure him for a dinner; and even to get his presence for a few minutes at an evening party was an object to be intrigued for long in advance. He only went amongst those who had shown some interest in his particular movement. No persuasion, no entreaty, could induce him to accept what may be called a general or miscellaneous invitation. He never consented to dine out or go out anywhere for the mere sake of meeting fashionable people and distinguished strangers.

Now, we have already mentioned the invitation pressed upon him by the Duke of Magdiel in the name of the Duchess, which Montana had coldly and almost contemptuously declined. The refusal naturally only made the Duchess still more eager to have him at her house, or even to meet him at some other house. It was impossible for her ever to unbend so far as to make the attempt again in her own name, even if there had been the least chance of success. She was therefore beginning quietly to give up the idea, and resigning herself to the conviction that, after all, these Americans have no manners. But her daughter, Lady Vanessa Barnes, was not to be so easily disconcerted. She had married a man whom her mother did not like, and who was not of aristocratic rank, but who made up for his defects by having an immense amount of money, and by looking up to his young wife as the head of his house and the star of his existence. Lady Vanessa Barnes held herself to be in a sort of rivalry to the Duchess as regarded social distinction, and had never quite forgiven her mother the coldness which the Duchess at one time showed to her future son-in-law. Lady Vanessa Barnes hardly ever made any movement in social life without having in the recesses of her mind some thought of the opportunity it gave her

of showing how great a man her husband was, and how she could bring all the world to his feet as well as to her own. The moment she heard of the rebuff given to the Duchess by Montana, she determined that Montana must appear in her drawing-room, and be seen by the Duchess there. She was very clever, very beautiful, very ignorant, full of audacity and self-complacency, and with about as much reverence in her nature as a schoolboy has. She had heard a great deal about Montana, but to her he was for a long time only a funny sort of man who had odd notions, and about whom people used to tire her with their ravings. But he became a very important personage indeed when there was a chance of bringing him to her drawing-room and showing him off in triumph to her mother the Duchess.

Lady Vanessa quickly went to work. She besought all her male friends who knew anything of Montana to try to get him to dine at her house, or even to come to one of her parties. All her plans proved failures. 'I will have him, all the same,' she said to herself; and the more the difficulties seemed to grow, the greater grew her determination to overcome them. She had not many accomplishments, but she was a remarkably good amateur actress. She had so much courage that she could always make the fullest use of any gift she possessed, and she had the audacious purity of a savage girl. She once played the part of a saucy page at some private theatricals in her own house, and when the play was over she mingled with the company for the rest of the evening in her page's dress, making fearless and full display of her beautiful legs. Lady Vanessa went to hear Montana speak, and formed her opinion of him in a moment.

'The man has no more head than a pin,' said the audacious lady. 'I don't see anything in him. He is very handsome, but I don't care for beauty-men. I think I can manage *him*.'

It was not difficult for anyone interested in Montana's movements to find out where he passed his days and his evenings, with whom he had luncheon, and with whom he dined. He was dining one day with Captain Marion and his household, and the ladies had left the room and the men were alone, when a servant brought a message that a person, who would give no name, wished particularly to speak a few words with Mr. Montana.

Montana never refused to obey a summons of this kind. It suited his purpose to show that he was ready to receive an appeal from anyone, however unknown, and that he placed himself and his services at the disposal of all humanity. He did not ask who the person was, or even whether it was a man or a woman. He

instantly rose, as a soldier rises at the word of command, and left the dining-room.

'Montana hardly ever gets a moment to himself,' said Captain Marion, with a certain air of vexation, for one of his guests had just succeeded in drawing the leader and prophet into a conversation, animated on Montana's part to an unusual extent.

'Can't think how he manages to see so many people, and to do so much,' one of the guests remarked. 'Does he see everyone that asks for him? They say he does.'

'I really think he does,' said Marion. 'I never heard of his refusing to see anybody. If the crossing-sweeper from over the way wanted to have a discourse on the immortality of the soul with him, Montana would leave his dearest friend and go and talk with the new inquirer.'

Meanwhile Montana was shown into the little library, and there he found a tall young woman, veiled, according to the immemorial custom of mysterious heroines.

'You don't know me, Mr. Montana,' the lady began, without giving him time for thought; 'but I know you; everyone knows you. I have come to-night to claim a service at your hands. I ask you to believe that it is one which will do you no discredit, and which, I think, you ought not to refuse. Will you trust yourself with me, and go to a place not ten minutes' drive from here?'

Montana was a little puzzled. He began to doubt whether he had not to do with some crazy religious enthusiast.

'I think,' he said coldly, 'I should like to know what sort of service I can render you, or what object I could serve.'

'You have no right to ask any questions,' was the quick answer. 'I claim your service. I must have your presence and your assistance. More depends upon it than you can think of now.'

'But am I the only one who could be of use?'

'You are the only one,' she replied. 'Do you think I would have sought you out in this audacious way if any but you could render the help which a human soul now demands?'

'Are you sincere?'

'Look in my face, and say if I appear like one who would waste your time to no purpose.' She threw up her veil, and showed Montana certainly a very handsome face, with bold dark eyes that looked into his own without a gleam of admiration or homage or coquetry, but only earnest resolve.

Montana became a little interested.

'It is not far, you say?'

'Ten minutes' drive,' said she. 'My carriage will take you there. I am a lady, although what I am doing now might not lead you to think so; and I know you don't care for ladies. You would grant my request much more readily, I dare say, if I were a poor milliner's girl. No matter; I cannot help myself. I must be what I was born. And now let us waste no more time. Come with me.'

Montana took his hat, and went with her. They got into a carriage, and drove in silence through some streets and squares. She never spoke a word, neither did he. It did not escape his observation, as she moved once or twice in the carriage, that under her veil and cloak she was in evening dress.

They came to a stately house. Montana got out and handed her from the carriage.

'Come with me,' she said.

They passed up a flight of stairs, amongst many servants and some bustle. Montana was more and more puzzled. She drew him into a small side room, threw off her veil and cloak, and showed her tall and very handsome figure in evening dress. Then with a laugh, she said: 'Mr. Montana, you don't know me. I am Lady Vanessa Barnes, and my mother is the Duchess of Magdiel. I tried to get hold of you in a fair and open way. I sent you invitations again and again, and you would not come. So I determined to carry you off; and I have carried you off, and played this ridiculous game; and you will only look foolish if you don't fall into the thing now, and let people think you came here of your own free will. Otherwise it will be all over the town to-morrow that the great Mr. Montana was made the victim of a practical joke by Lady Vanessa Barnes. You can't help yourself; so come, forgive me, there's a dear man, and let us go into my drawing-room, and I'll present you to my mother.'

Montana had at least one great quality of leadership. The more sudden a difficulty, the more quickly he saw how to deal with it. When driven into a dangerous corner, all his hesitancy and viewy vagueness left him, and he could survey the whole situation and make up his mind what to do in an instant. He saw at once that, trivial and ridiculous as his present embarrassment might appear, it was really serious for him. It would never do if it were to get known through London that the great mysterious leader of men had been made the victim of a saucy young woman's practical joke, and turned into the laughing-stock of a fashionable drawing-room. Anything must be done to avoid that. He at once accepted Lady Vanessa's invitation, and took

her apologies with a gracious gravity which almost impressed her. He met her guests, was the lion of the evening, was inexpressibly polite to the Duchess of Magdiel, condescending to the Duke. He managed somehow to give the Duke and Duchess, and many other people, to understand that he had come there solely to oblige Lady Vanessa. He spoke of Lady Vanessa with an almost paternal tenderness. Everyone assumed that she was among his most devoted followers and closest friends. Lady Vanessa herself was positively bewildered.

'Call me good at acting!' she said to herself. 'I can't compare with him. I'm not in it at all. One would think the man had dandled me in his arms in my innocent infancy!'

She had gained her point, however, and felt grateful to him, and was determined never to let anyone know what she had done. She began to feel interested in him, and to have a sort of admiration for him. His coolness, and what she would irreverently have called his 'cheek,' overpowered her.

Montana was determined, for his part, to exhibit Lady Vanessa everywhere in the character of his close friend and pupil. In no other way, he thought, could he escape the risk of being one day or other made ridiculous by the true story getting out. He would exhibit her in the East End as well as in the West. The congregation of the Church of Free Souls must see the beautiful and high-born Lady Vanessa accompany him thither one Sunday. That would make all safe. Even if the story got about then, it would not be believed. Montana felt a good deal interested, too, in the sprightly audacity of the young woman. The very manner in which she had made light of him gave her a curious interest in his eyes. He was weary of the adoration and adulation of women. He positively admired this woman who had laughed at him, and was ready, if opportunity should arise, to laugh at him again. He had been drawn to Geraldine Rowan from the first by her evident dislike of him, and the resolute manner in which she repelled him. He was growing into a profound and, for him, an almost impassioned, admiration of the girl who had thus treated him. He was beginning to believe that Geraldine was the indispensable companion of his life and sharer in his plans. He told himself that she was predestined for him, and he predestined to conquer her, to make her love him, to make her become his wife. He had set his heart upon this; and in what he set his heart upon, Montana always saw the finger of Providence. It was not so much that he loved Geraldine, but that he would not do without her; she must marry him.

In a very much modified and milder way he felt a desire now for the friendship of Lady Vanessa Barnes. The lady, for her part, liked his company well enough. It amused her to go about with him here and there; to drive him in her pony-carriage; to exhibit him in the Park; to parade him at Mr. Barnes's dinner-parties. He was still as much as ever the lion of the season, and it was something for her to be always able to command his presence. She had tried to penetrate into the story of his early life, and the one only return she had for her curiosity was an impression which somehow seemed to be conveyed to her that he was a man of high birth, who had deliberately made up his mind at an early age to sever himself from the society to which he naturally belonged. He did not say this to her, but she came to think it; perhaps had fancied it all for herself. Still, when she did jump to the conclusion, she let Montana know quickly enough that such was her conviction, and Montana did not contradict her or set her right. He only smiled a sweet vague smile, and said nothing. He was about this time beginning himself to think that there must be some truth in this theory of his lofty ancestry and stately youth.

It was easily arranged, then, that Lady Vanessa and her husband should go with Montana one Sunday to the Church of Free Souls. On the day appointed for the expedition Montana was himself to deliver an exhortation to the Free Souls who lived on the smoke-wreaths of doctrine that went up from the altars of that temple. Montana came to the church with Lady Vanessa and her husband in their carriage; he handed Lady Vanessa out in the full sight of an awe-stricken crowd. Even the most uncompromising democratic spirits of the place were pleased, at first, to see their prophet in aristocratic company.

The Church of Free Souls was very crowded on this particular day. To get to see Montana, even for a moment, was the ambition of a great many. To be able to hear him speak was a thing to struggle and crush and wrangle for. To hear him speak from what in an ordinary temple would have been called a pulpit was to confer on one's self a sort of distinction for the remainder of the season. Then, the peculiarity of the place in which the discourse was to be held, and its odd out-of-the-way situation, lent a new and weird charm to the attraction of the day. Therefore the Church of Free Souls had a specially strange and motley congregation. Carriages thronged the narrow ways that led to it. Unwonted silks and satins rustled through its dingy passages and up its decaying stairs. Huge servants in

plush, with powdered heads, lounged about its rickety doors, and looked mildly contemptuous at the slums and the people around. Artisans, with close-cut hair and keen dark eyes, hustled their way impatiently through this fashionable throng of fine ladies and finer footmen. Professional-looking young men, with rounded bulging foreheads and spectacles and long colourless hair, were pushing eagerly in. Young women in waterproofs, and with uncared-for locks and fringes, represented clearly the speculative part of the fair sex—the ladies who have 'views' as to woman's rights on this side of the grave, and are aggressively sceptical as to anybody's rights, wrongs, or existence on the other.

Just as Montana was handing Lady Vanessa out of her carriage, another carriage brought up Captain Marion, Geraldine, Sydney Marion, and Melissa. Melissa grew red and her eyes shot angry fire as she saw the leader's attention to the great lady of whose friendship for Montana she had already heard. For the first time in her life Melissa began to form political opinions, and they tended very decidedly in the direction of Radicalism. It flashed through her mind at that moment that the only thing which could make the world sufferable to rational and high-spirited persons would be the instant abolition of the order of aristocracy, and it is not certain that there was not at the same time in her breast a special yearning for very severe measures to be taken against the feminine members of that order.

Montana only saw Lady Vanessa as far as the inner door of the temple. He then withdrew to enter the building by a side door, intending to remain in seclusion until the moment should arrive for him to come out upon the platform and begin his discourse. Montana made it a rule never to exhibit himself to a congregation of any kind before he had to speak, or after he had finished speaking. He kept out of sight, in mystic seclusion, until just the moment came for him to begin his address. Then he presented himself to his admirers, and the moment he had done speaking he bowed and withdrew. Even if he had to be one of many speakers at a public meeting, he always took care never to arrive at the place, or at least never to appear on the platform, until it was his turn to go on. He had an impression that for an audience to have a man long under their eyes diminishes their interest in him. They grow familiar; they are critical; they begin, perhaps, to study minute points of appearance, of dress or deportment. The glory of a leader's presence might thus have its lustre worn away. Montana always took

care that, as far as might be, his dress should be faultless. He wore it of the latest fashion of whatever civilised country he happened to be travelling in. To him there always seemed a dash of the vulgar about the ambition of some persons to look like foreigners, even like picturesque foreigners, in any country. Montana's principle was to dress up to the newest fashion of the people surrounding him; and to let his personal appearance impress by its own merits, without aid from oddness or foreign ways. The audience was settling down. An observer of any keenness could not have failed to notice its curious and motley composition. The mingling of rich and poor is of course a condition of all congregations; but congregations do not usually exhibit many different types of class-character, if such a word may be used, and of intellectual and moral individualism. Almost every man and woman here appeared to represent a separate mental order. So, at least, it seemed to Geraldine, as she looked round the nearest benches. Katherine sat by her, flushed and eager and nervous; Melissa pale, with downcast eyes, as if she hardly ventured to look up. Mr. Trescoe was supposed to be somewhere about the building, but he had got lost, and nobody took any trouble to find him. Clement Hope came in, and on his arm as he went up the hall leant his stately father. Many eyes turned towards the tall handsome young man, and the still taller old man with the fine head of grey hair and the broad shoulders, and the dignified half-soldierly bearing. He seemed to lean on Clement's arm more out of affection than because of any need of a staff or prop to sustain his steps. The congregation inclosed many remarkable faces and many remarkable pairs, but no pair more remarkable than Mr. Varlowe and Clement.

There was a long service before the orator of the day appeared. The spiritual guide who usually conducted the ministrations of the church began by reading various portions from the theologies of all countries, the object of this exposition being to show that, whatever men might have said, or thought they said, or wanted to say, at all times and in all ages, on the question of the soul and the future life, they all believed exactly the same thing, and that the more strongly they contradicted their neighbours the more irresistibly did they prove that they and their neighbours were in complete accordance. Confucius and Pascal, Mahomet and Cardinal Newman, Torquemada and the prophet Ali, George Fox and Dryden's Shaftesbury, were satisfactorily made out to have been in the most full and exquisite harmony in

regard to their religious beliefs. The only objection, indeed, which the preacher seemed capable of suggesting with regard to the theological views of men in all ages and in all countries, was that a certain monotony pervaded them, and that it would have been rather better if they could now and then have managed to get up a slight difference of opinion, if only for the sake of adding interest to their speculations. The preacher then delivered a short discourse of his own, in which he explained that the great orator, teacher, soldier, and preacher from the New World, the man who himself proposed to found another and a newer world, had consented to offer a few suggestions to that congregation to-day. He gave a brief outline of Montana's career, glowing into a kind of eloquence as he went on, and described Montana as one who had been warrior, explorer, pioneer, political leader, and spiritual guide, and who now, he said, had been able to lay the hand that had wielded the sabre and the pickaxe in the soft clasp of London fashion, and had bidden the West End to throb with a new and noble pulsation. He drew some such picture of Montana in the fashionable circles of London as Horace Walpole in two or three lines has done of Burke amongst the nobility and the wits of Paris, where the charm and earnestness of Burke for a while, we are told, made Christianity fashionable. He alluded also to Montana as a man who originally came from the Old World, and, he vaguely hinted, from some great old family. The impression left upon the minds of the congregation was that Montana's birth and parentage were of a lustre fully in keeping with that of his personal career. If he condescended to clasp hands with the working men as they were, it was not because he might not have lived, if he chose, all his life in the drawing-rooms of duchesses and the anterooms of palaces. The speaker so fully believed all he said, and was evidently so thoroughly impressed by Montana, that his discourse fell with strong effect on the expectant congregation. Those who had seen Montana and those who had not seen him were alike eager for the moment when the hero of the hour should make his appearance.

At the right time, and from a side door to which people's eyes would not naturally have turned, Montana suddenly came out and stood in an instant full in face of the congregation, on the platform from which the former speaker had just been addressing them. A pale ray of sun found its way through the blurred panes of one window, and fell slanting on Montana's head and face. He looked handsome, impressive, and almost unreal as he stood for a moment in perfect silence, and with his

eyes looking directly at the congregation, and seeming to search into the thoughts of every man and woman who gazed at him.

There was a moment's pause, and then Montana had just begun with the words 'My brothers and my sisters,' when a cry from the midst of the hall turned every eye and every thought away from him. The cry came from the lips of the tall white-haired old man whom people had noticed not long before as he entered the church. Rising to his feet and clutching the rail of the seat before him, Mr. Varlowe fixed his gaze on Montana, and called aloud, 'Oh, Absalom, my son! my son!'

CHAPTER XV.

'DOTH NOT A MEETING LIKE THIS MAKE AMENDS?'

Perhaps, if Montana had not had time to resist the first impulse of his mind, he might have given in to what certain writers call 'the voice of nature.' Perhaps he might have welcomed with outward satisfaction at least his father's recognition, and owned himself the long-lost son. But unluckily for him, he had time to reflect. He could not stop in the middle of his discourse. He had to go on, and while going on he was well able to detach his thoughts from his subject and think over the course that was best for him to take. His eloquence did not cost him much trouble. The words came easily; the thoughts were vague or very slender. A thread of idea was able to water a whole field of phrase. He was free to let his eloquence stream away as it would while he tried to review his position and decide as to his course. He was not long undecided. Before he had got through half-a-dozen flowing sentences of monotonous eloquence and vague grandeur, he had made up his mind.

Perhaps even then, if Lady Vanessa Barnes had not been with him, if she had not been brought into the place by him, if he had not exhibited her as a sort of stately captive in front of the whole congregation, he might have taken the part for a moment of a sincere and honest man, and gained by it in the end. But he could not resolve to step down from his pinnacle of greatness in her presence. Just now he had the superiority, but in a moment the tables would be turned. He dreaded her free and thoughtless laughter, her ridicule and her contempt. He knew what sort of story she would make for her friends of the ridiculous scene she had witnessed in the East End church when the great leader and prophet, whose descent was veiled in mystery almost as sublime as that of one of the sons of the Greek gods, was claimed

in the church by a retired livery-stable keeper, and had to confess himself the son of such a father. Rather than suffer that, Montana thought, he would do anything. He kept telling himself all the time that it was not for any idle pride of his own, but for the sake of the cause. What would become of the cause he was to lead, the people whose chief and prophet he was to be, if he were thus made a theme for aristocratic ridicule and popular laughter? Then, after all, perhaps the old man was mistaken. There was still hope. It might turn out that the man was not Mr. Varlowe and his father, but somebody else; and in any case, is everything true that one fancies has happened in his childhood and his youth? Perhaps it was all but a dream, the memory of that old narrow vulgar time in the coarse Northern town, when the youth of genius was still only dreaming of a career; that time when even love itself seemed a burden to an ambitious young man determined to dazzle the world, and still kept back by the clinging arms of his tender wife. All that ought to be a dream—ought to be only as smoke and cloud in the career of a great man, to be puffed away from the memory and regarded as nothing. Montana made up his mind. He put it to himself in one moment and in one phrase. The phrase suddenly rose up in his mind, and it nearly came to his tongue. It satisfied him; it suited him as well as a code of morality. The phrase was this: 'The man who would do great things belongs to the future, not to the past.'

Montana stood erect upon his platform, determined to belong to the future, not to the past. He saw his father's eyes fixed on him with intense and wistful eagerness. He could see that Clement Hope was striving to keep the old man quiet, probably until some seemly moment should come for a meeting between him and his supposed son. He could see astonishment in the eyes of many people. He could see Lady Vanessa Barnes look up to him with amused curiosity in her looks. He turned his eyes composedly away and began his discourse.

The discourse was surely very eloquent. It must have been. It told of 'the continuity of the human race.' It established the principle that men in this world, and in whatever world, are capable of working in constant unbroken co-operation; that the workers in other spheres are influencing us by their help and sympathy and their encouragement if we be only worthy to receive it; and that we in our turn can spread the widening circle of our influence to realms of whose composition and population we have no conception now. To some of his listeners it seemed

an almost angelic eloquence. Montana's voice was so sweet, sonorous, and musical; his action was so graceful, his look was so intense, that some who gazed on him and listened to him seemed to be lifted into a higher and a purer atmosphere than that of the common day. Some there were, probably, even in that hall, who found a certain difficulty in understanding what Montana was talking about, who did not quite see that he had clearly made out an immediate connection between themselves and everybody else in all creation, and who even had a sort of doubt as to whether Montana really knew much more about all the other worlds he was describing than they did themselves.

Perhaps, if Clement Hope had had a mind free to pay any attention to the subject, he might have become a little sceptical too: but happily for his continued faith in his leader, his whole soul was absorbed in the effort to keep Mr. Varlowe in decorous restraint. He was so agitated and perturbed by what had happened, and what he feared might again happen, that he had no thought for the words of the orator. The sweet full voice sounded in his ears, but brought with it no meaning to his senses.

As for Sydney Marion, she tried to catch a gleam of distinct meaning now and then, honestly tried and honestly reasoned with herself as to whether it was not her stupidity, and whether, after all, the people around were not right, and the discourse was not eloquent, entrancing, exalting. But it came to an end without having convinced her that she was wrong.

Lady Vanessa listened with good-humoured indifference—that is to say, she listened to a passage now and then, but, as she did not care much about the continuity of the race, she allowed her thoughts to wander away to anything else. The incident which preluded the discourse astonished her for a while, but she assumed that it was really only the case of some crazy old man whose admiration for the great Montana had led him into some ridiculous demonstration. That sort of thing, for aught she knew, might be one of the ordinary ceremonies of the Church of Free Souls. She remembered having been taken when she was a child to some sort of church or meeting-house, or religious assemblage of some kind, where an old woman got up and sang a queer crooning chant in the middle of the ceremonies, and nobody seemed shocked or even astonished. Therefore, for all she knew, grey-haired men might be crying out symbolical recognition of imaginary sons at every meeting of the Church of Free Souls. Such might, in fact, be only the accepted way among that congregation of expressing admiration for the preacher; some-

thing in a manner equivalent to the 'hear, hear' of the House of Commons.

As for Geraldine, she, like Clement Hope, was wholly absorbed by the strange incident, by the cry of the old man, his wild recognition of a supposed son. Her eyes were fixed all the time on him and on Clement. She watched with the deepest sympathy and interest the young man's eager efforts to keep the old man from again disturbing the quiet of the audience. She admired Mr. Varlowe's face and figure. He seemed the artist's very ideal of a noble and a loving father claiming a long-lost son, if one were seeking such subject for a picture. She felt deeply for Clement. She assumed that some pathetic memory must have proved too much for Mr. Varlowe, and made him for the moment like one distraught, and she was grieved to think of the pain that would have to be borne by poor Clement if the mood of distraction should last. She felt a strange longing, which it would have needed some courage to gratify, even in that odd place—a longing to go over and take a seat at Mr. Varlowe's other side, and help Clement in trying to quiet him, and comfort him, and reason him out of his delusion. Indeed, she was so impulsive a girl that, if Sydney Marion had not been with her, it is quite possible that she might have made an attempt to carry this longing into action. But under Sydney Marion's quiet eyes she felt morally coerced into remaining quiet, and so she sat and endured Montana's discourse, and did not even try to catch the meaning of one word of it.

The discourse came to an end at last. Montana descended the steps of his platform slowly, and with his accustomed air of unruffled composure. He looked earnestly to where Mr. Varlowe and Clement were sitting, and his look was full of sympathy and commiseration. Some kindly wonder and curiosity were expressed in it as well. He almost stopped for a moment as he was about to leave the room, in order to turn one other glance upon the old man who had so strangely interrupted his discourse. Everyone saw Montana thus employ his sympathetic eyes; and many thought it but another evidence, if such were needed, of Montana's tenderness for all men. There were persons who might have been so vexed, even preachers and professed ministers of religion, by any interruption of the kind as to lose patience and pity for the author of the disturbance. But Montana had only sympathy and kindly feeling for this foolish old man, who had so nearly turned the whole proceedings of the day into ridicule.

Why did a sudden ray of strange conviction pierce into the perplexity of Geraldine's mind just at that moment? She never could tell; but the expression on Montana's face, which deceived so many others, carried instant enlightenment to her. She felt sure that the old man was Montana's father, and that Montana knew it. This had not occurred to her at first. She thought, like everybody else, that the poor old man was simply the victim of an hallucination born of his love and his hope. But Montana's expression as he looked across at Mr. Varlowe seemed to strike home to her very heart with the conviction that he was acting a part. The expression was so carefully, so artificially adjusted for the occasion, as it seemed to her, that it could only be put on for the purpose of playing out a part. It may be that she was helped to this belief by the striking likeness which she suddenly saw in Montana's face and figure to the face and figure of the old man who claimed him as a son. Mr. Varlowe was but Montana whitened with the hoar-frost of time. Montana was but a dark-haired and cold-hearted Mr. Varlowe. Geraldine felt terribly satisfied of the truth of her conviction; terribly, because there was something appalling in the belief that such a man was an utter impostor, and that nobody would believe it but herself, and that she would have to be that very day, almost every day, in his company.

As Montana passed out of the room, he fixed on Clement a special look of affectionate interest and sympathy. Mr. Varlowe gazed wistfully after him, and made a movement as if he would leave his seat. Clement quietly kept him in his place. Geraldine could see that to Mr. Varlowe's start and gaze of imploring affection Montana only responded by the same look of interested kindliness and commiseration, the look of one who feels for some apparent delusion or sorrow on the part of a perfect stranger. Geraldine felt as if the blood in her veins were turning chill.

Montana remained in his room alone until the short service was over. He was waiting with quiet composure, although with a mind far from quiet, for the inevitable moment, not many moments off, when he must be confronted with his father. The time came. A knock was heard at the door. Montana opened it, and his father and Clement Hope came in. Mr. Varlowe began in his rough Northern way: 'You don't mean to say you don't know me, Edmund, my boy? You don't mean to say you don't recognise your father? You are Edmund Varlowe. Good God! of course you are. I'd know you among ten thousand.'

Montana turned to Clement and looked into his eyes. Clement's own gaze had wonder and bewilderment in it. Montana looked him full in the face, and shook his head with a kindly commiserating expression.

'This is Mr. Varlowe, your father?' he asked of the young man.

'Yes,' said Clement; 'he thinks you are his son.'

'Thinks he is my son!' Mr. Varlowe exclaimed; 'God! I know he is my son. Do you think I could ever be mistaken? I have waited, and watched, and prayed for him to come back these years, and I knew he would come back. I knew he would come all the time, and I knew him the moment I saw him come into that pulpit to preach. Why won't you speak? Why won't you say you know me?'

'My dear old friend,' said Montana sweetly, 'I am sorry, so sorry, to have to disappoint your hopes, your very, very natural hopes, to see your son. Assuredly you will see him one day yet—pray Heaven you may. But you are mistaken about me. I am not your son. I could wish I were, to be the son of so fond a father, and to be able to give him back the hope of his life; but you will trust to a better and a higher hope than I can give you. I am not you son.'

Mr. Varlowe threw his arms wildly out, as if he would call all the world and all nature to bear witness for him in his extraordinary bewilderment.

'Well,' he said, 'this beats all? This is what I have been waiting for and praying for these years. This is what I have longed for; and now it all comes to this! My son comes back, and he don't know me, and he won't know me! What are you ashamed of, Edmund? Do you think I am poor? I am not poor. I have plenty of money. Do you think I will trouble you or interfere with you? I will not. You may have any career you like now. I will help you to it. You shall have all my money. You shall have anything. Don't say you are not my boy. Don't, don't say it!'

Montana shook his head sadly and sweetly. He felt no mental or moral difficulty, now that the step was taken. He had decided that he was not the son of the old livery-stable keeper, and, in his present condition, that decision had settled everything. He felt no trouble of conscience, but was serenely satisfied with himself. He was sorry for the old man, but it was only as one is sorry for somebody in a play, or at most is sorry for some stranger whose grief one sees and pities, but cannot share.

Clement tried to draw Mr. Varlowe away.

'You had better come, father; and don't you think you ought to say something to Mr. Montana to explain your mistake? You see it is a mistake now, don't you?'

'It is not a mistake,' Mr. Varlowe exclaimed in a thundering voice, smiting the floor with his stick. 'I never was mistaken; I could not be mistaken in my boy. That is my Edmund, though he casts me off; and he is my Edmund still, though I cast him off now. Come away, Clem, my lad. You are my son now, and you alone; but as sure as God's in heaven, that man there is Edmund Varlowe, who was the son of my wife, Catherine Varlowe, and of myself; and all the world will know it one day, just as well as he knows it now. Come away, lad.'

CHAPTER XVI.

'ALL FANCY-SICK SHE IS.'

MONTANA got into Lady Vanessa's carriage. He was to have luncheon with her and her husband that day. Lady Vanessa chaffed him saucily and even rudely about the old man who had claimed him as a son. She had little idea of the mischief she was doing. Any chance that there might have been of Montana's returning to a sense of honour and duty was lost on that drive to Lady Vanessa's house. Montana began to hate the sprightly lady in his heart, but to hate her with a strange blending of admiration, and even with a throb of passion that was not hate. There was something so new to him in the sensation of being thus chaffed and laughed at by a handsome woman, that it gave a strange turn to his thoughts, and opened a new spring of excitement in his chill and lonely career; chill in the midst of all outer excitement and inner emotion, lonely amongst incessant crowds. He felt curious longings to be revenged on the sprightly lady, and knew for the first time the bitter-sweet sensation that comes to a man when he is angry with a woman and yet is forced to admire her.

He went home that night in doubting mood, unusual to him. He began to feel that his way was slipping from beneath him, or at least that he himself was slipping away from the path he had marked out. He found that there were emotions which could disturb him still, and which had nothing to do with his own career and public work. He had believed himself absolutely unimpassioned, master of all his emotions, capable of controlling not only every look, but every thought, and already he found himself distracted from the straight path by the strange

and, as it seemed, almost fatal admiration he felt for Geraldine Rowan. And now for his further confusion came the cross-light of a new sensation far inferior in intensity and very different in colour, but strong enough to perplex and dazzle for the moment —a flame of petulant emotion towards a pretty, saucy, young, aristocratic woman! a fear of her, and a longing to obtain some sort of mastery over her.

Montana began to think it would be well for him to set about his great scheme, to put it in motion, and make a grand triumphal departure from London with the close of the season, carrying Geraldine Rowan with him as his wife and as the companion of his expedition, his associate in the foundation of the sublime colony beyond the seas, out of which a new world and a new life for the old world were gradually to arise.

Did Montana really believe in this scheme? That, we suppose, no one can ever know. It is not likely—at least, from what was afterwards discovered, it does not seem likely—that he had ever thought the matter deliberately over, or had done more than allow the idea to grow upon him from day to day. He believed very thoroughly in himself, and believed that anything he started must come to a success. He had worked himself into a Napoleonic faith in his star, and in Heaven's special protection of him. This faith may have been born of sheer vanity, or of prolonged mental strain almost approaching to a condition of intellectual derangement, but at all events it supplied him with any quality of earnestness which he could be said to have possessed. Whatever the strength of his faith, either in his project or himself, it does not appear that at this time he was making any preparation to carry his great scheme into effect. He listened to people's suggestions concerning it, and answered all manner of inquiries and letters. He gave everyone to understand that the scheme was growing into active movement day by day, and that he had all its details under his own eyes and in his own hands; but nobody was ever admitted to genuine confidence with him, nor did he tell anybody what his preparations were. He was merely at present enjoying his success in his own fashion. He had found a career, and this was its zenith and its consummation. His strongest ambition all his life through had been to play to one great audience, that of London; to fashionable, aristocratic, wealthy London in the stalls and boxes, and artisan, hard-handed, poor-living London in the galleries. Now he had reached the height of his hope. With one hand he grasped the West End and with the other the East. His

vanity ought to have been almost satisfied. If he was capable of deliberately thinking over a difficulty or a crisis of any kind, we might assume that he went calmly and fully into counsel with himself, reviewed his position, and set his plans out before him to look at them. We might assume that, having done this, he had come to the conclusion that the zenith of his London career had in any case been reached; that even if nothing out of the common had risen, his object now must be to avoid the risk of a descent or an anti-climax; and that the incident in the church had hastened the necessity for bringing the London episode to a conclusion. On the other hand, anything like a hasty departure from London would only give the appearance of probability to the most improbable story—Montana had now really worked himself into a mood to regard Mr. Varlowe's story as monstrously improbable—and make people lose faith in him. The conclusion to which Montana came was that he must stay in London to the close of the season and then depart. But it is not likely that this conclusion came by virtue of any slow and careful process of thought. It came to Montana by instinct, as most of his conclusions did. That was his way. He had no thought of a resolution one moment, and it was a fixed resolve the next. It pleased and comforted him to think that these instinctive and somewhat feminine conclusions were special revelations—the voices of oracles speaking within his breast and guiding him aright.

The little incident in the Church of Free Souls did seem likely to have a certain influence over public opinion. It got about in all manner of more or less distorted versions. In no case did it amount to anything much more than the fact that there had been a scene in the church when Montana spoke there, and that some old man, whom nobody knew, had professed to recognise Montana as his son, and that Montana had disclaimed him. There was not much in that, perhaps, and very few people went into the question seriously enough to ask themselves whether the old man was sane or insane, or whether there was the slightest foundation for the idea he had taken up. Still, the incident was of a certain importance. It called sharp attention to the fact that there was some mystery about Montana's career which might not be a great and superb thing after all. The stream might, if traced back to its source, be found to arise in a commonplace little well in a stable-yard, instead of a dark and sacred spring among the solemn trees of some historic and haunted grove. The story set curiosity and inquiry going in that direction, and that in itself was not ominous of good for

Montana. It indicated a new turn in public opinion. Up to that time, people who disputed about him had only disputed as to the man himself, his earnestness, his sincerity, his eloquence. Now they began to ask, 'What is he, after all? Where does he come from? Is his own account of himself the true one?'

Lady Vanessa told the story wherever she went, embellishing it with heedless humour here and there. From her lips it became a story of grotesque and Hudibrastic drollery. It told of a whole service suddenly disturbed, an entire congregation startled, first stricken with amazement, and then convulsed with laughter; of an orator and a prophet interrupted in the full flood of his discourse by a maniac, who insisted on rushing into the pulpit with him, clinging round his neck, sobbing on his bosom, and claiming him as his long-lost son. Lady Vanessa admired Montana in her own peculiar way, which had nothing whatever of coquetry about it; but she delighted in making fun of him and trying to make him look ridiculous. It was a real pleasure to her, the sense of power which she felt when she could succeed in making so conspicuous a man—such an idol of society and of the people—seem an object of laughter. It gave her the same sort of delight that some people get from annoying a favourite dog, or from putting ludicrous ornaments on a pet cat.

If things went on like this, people would soon begin to insist on questioning themselves and their friends as to the exact meaning of some of Montana's sayings, and the precise practical nature of that scheme for a new world which he was understood to have in hand. Vaguely, strangely, a sense of the growing danger appeared to creep in upon Montana's mind. He began to feel it as one even in a well-warmed and curtained room grows to be conscious of the presence of the east wind. He became impressed with the necessity for doing something—what, he did not yet exactly know. Montana was a man who, when brought face to face with a difficulty and compelled to act, would always act with wonderful quickness, energy, and courage. As indolent men of a certain class are surprisingly energetic when they have to shake off their indolence and do something, so Montana, a born dreamer of the unimaginative order—a man who could dream about himself for hours and days, and contemplate himself, his career, and his soul, as an Indian fakir contemplates his body—had, when brought face to face with the necessity for action, the instinct of a commander and the eye of a pilot. He was conscious of this himself, and therefore never troubled himself about decisions and plans till necessity brought

the moment of making the decision and announcing the plan. The incident in the Church of Free Souls had much disturbed some of the inmates of Captain Marion's household. Geraldine kept silent about it. She would not give any opinion. Melissa raged and blazed against the silly old man who had presumed to interfere with Mr. Montana, and she somehow seemed to take Clement Hope into her wrath, and to regard the whole thing as a device in which that luckless young man had been directly and malignantly engaged. Katherine was on the same side, but she was more timid about expressing her opinions. She seemed scared—an unusual thing for her—and cast furtive, almost fearful, glances every now and then at her husband, as if she were actually beginning to be afraid of him. Mr. Trescoe, indeed, came out also in a new light. He spoke with an energy that no one ever before had supposed him to have. He boldly and bluntly denounced Montana as a 'genuine humbug,' declared that he had not the slightest doubt the old fellow was his father, and a deuced deal too good a father for such a charlatan, and prophesied that before three months were over Montana would be known to everybody as a quack and a sham. These fearful opinions were combated with such anger and contempt by Melissa, that Captain Marion had to beg of Trescoe to discontinue his attacks in order to save Melissa's temper, and spare the nerves of the company. Captain Marion himself was clear and satisfied in his mind. Montana said the old man was not his father, and there was an end of the matter. The old man had been such a long time hoping and praying for his son's return, that he was ready to accept any good-looking stranger as the long-lost heir. The wonder was, Captain Marion said, that he had not found somebody to take the place of his vanished son long ago. Whatever Montana said must be true. Captain Marion was not even annoyed or offended by those who did not agree with him on this point. It was settled and certain.

Mr. Aquitaine came suddenly up from the North, and heard the description of the whole incident. The description, it must be owned, was given with very different colouring, and even very different array of facts, by the various people round Captain Marion's table. Aquitaine looked grave. He did not put away the whole affair as a trivial and unmeaning incident. In the North he had been making special inquiries about the young man who had once been employed in his house, and who was undoubtedly Mr. Varlowe's son. There were some clerks in the offices who still remembered young Varlowe clearly enough.

They all bore testimony to one set of facts: that he was very tall, dark, singularly handsome, with strange abstracted manners, and apparently an inordinate self-conceit and belief in himself. These statements set Aquitaine thinking. Now, when he heard that Mr. Varlowe had actually claimed Montana for his son, it did not impress his mind as absolutely certain that the old livery-stable keeper was labouring under an hallucination. This seemed to him to suggest some terribly momentous possibilities. If Montana was a deceiver in this, in what else might he not be a deceiver? It was now certain that, besides the hundreds and thousands in all classes who had faith in him, and would trust anything to him, some of Aquitaine's own nearest and dearest personal friends were ready to put their property, their lives, their happiness, almost their very souls, at his disposal. Up to this time Aquitaine had not the faintest notion how things were going with his own hapless little daughter. It was only when they discussed the question in Captain Marion's house at luncheon, and when he saw the girl's flashing eyes and quivering lips as she maintained Montana's perfect nobleness and integrity, it was only then that a suspicion shot into his mind, and made him ask himself bitterly why he had felt so much surprise that Marion took so little heed of his daughter Katherine and her too open devotion to Montana.

Aquitaine was prompt in action. He went at once to Melissa. He found the girl in her room, and opened his subject with a certain sternness very unusual for him in his dealings with her.

'Look here, Melissa,' he said. 'I want you to be more careful than you are in the way you talk about Mr. Montana.'

Melissa started, and turned her eyes upon the carpet. Her lips trembled.

'I don't like to hear any girl,' he said, 'talking with such open admiration and rapture about a man, and making herself his champion and his devotee. Besides, there is something I have heard about Montana—well, no, I won't say that; not that I have heard anything against him, but something has come to my mind that makes a sort of doubt—and it may be right, or it may be wrong—but anyhow it is not well, in the meantime, that you should get your name mixed up with his.'

'Oh, papa,' said Melissa, 'what are you saying?'

'Well, my dear, I am saying exactly what I think. Anybody who heard you raving about him to-day, before all those people, would think you were some silly girl who had fallen in love with the man and had not the sense to conceal it.'

Melissa looked up at first, red and angry, and Aquitaine expected one of her familiar outbursts of temper, but to his surprise her pretty little face became contorted, and she burst into tears.

'Why, what is the matter with the child?' her father said. 'I have not been saying anything very dreadful, Melissa. I am only giving you advice.'

She covered her eyes with her handkerchief, and only sobbed out:

'I never saw you angry like that with me before. I'm not used to it.'

'Well, well, my dear, I don't mean to be angry with you, but I want to impress you with some sense of the necessity of being a little careful. I quite understand a girl's admiring a man like Montana, and of course he is twenty years at least older than you are, and I dare say you don't think any harm about going into any raptures about a man of that age. But don't do it, my dear; be a little cautious. I can't tell you exactly what I am thinking of, and there is not very much to tell; but I am not quite certain about Montana, and I have given Marion a caution, though it won't do him any good, and his daughter Katherine makes exhibitions of herself almost as bad as'—he was going to say 'your own,' but he stopped out of tenderness for poor Melissa's feelings. He was a resolute man, however, when he clearly saw his way to anything, and he now saw his way very clearly to the necessity for checking Melissa's public displays of her admiration for Montana.

'Fact is, Mel,' he said, 'if you don't be a little more careful, I should think the best thing would be for you to come back with me to the North as soon as possible.'

She started at the words. Aquitaine saw with pain that the suggestion was a terror to her. She did not want to go home. It had come to that. Well, he must make allowances. London in the season is London in the season, to be sure, and girls will like parties and balls, and the opera, and visits, and all the rest of it, as long as grass grows and water runs, and the best of parents must be content to put up with the knowledge that his daughter can get on very well without him, and be very happy away from home, when her home is not in London. So he only winced, and pulled himself together, and was good-humoured as before.

'If you like to stay till the end of the season, Mel,' he said, 'you shall do so, my dear, but only on this condition, remember. Just bear my warning in mind. Don't make a display of your

admiration for our friend. It is a very natural admiration, I am sure, and in one way I am glad to find that you can admire anybody so much as that; and I did not think it, somehow, once; and I ought to be glad of it, and I am glad of it in a way; only, don't show it, my dear, don't show it so much.'

CHAPTER XVII.

GERALDINE'S EXPEDITION.

Now, there was nothing in all this conversation, one would think, that ought to have brought positive terror to the girl's breast. Nobody could know better than Melissa how little likely Mr. Aquitaine was to treat her with harshness; and, after all, even the most maidenly and modest of girls need not feel utterly humbled because her father has given her a caution not to talk too rapturously of a distinguished public man. One can easily imagine a very well-regulated and orderly little girl losing herself in wild avowals of admiration for Mr. Gladstone, or Mr. Browning, or Mr. Henry Irving, or Sir Frederick Leighton, and being bidden by her father to rave an octave or so lower in general company, and not feeling utterly crushed by the rebuke. But the moment Mr. Aquitaine had gone, Melissa threw herself down on the floor all of a heap, and bemoaned herself there for a while, cowering like one in physical terror. Then taken with a sudden thought, she jumped up, shook out her betossed skirts, dashed her hair into something like order, ran to Geraldine Rowan's room, and knocked at the door.

'Let me in! Quick! quick! Let me in!'

Geraldine opened the door, and let the alarmed girl in.

'Oh, Geraldine!' she exclaimed; 'I have done a dreadful thing. You must help me; you must do something—I don't know what; but you must get me out of this scrape. I am in such a fix! Oh, why did I ever do it!'

'What have you done, dear?' Geraldine asked, really alarmed at the girl's manner.

'Such a dreadful thing! Oh, how can I tell you? But I had better tell you than anybody else. You must get me out of it. You must! you must!'

'But what have you done, my child?'

'I have written to Mr. Montana. I have written a mad love-letter; I have put my name to it; and I have told him I'll go anywhere over the world with him, if he'll let me; follow him as a page, if he likes—I think people did such things in books,

didn't they?—or I'll—I'll—I'll marry him, if he likes—if he will have me!'

'You have not written this dreadful stuff to Mr. Montana?'

'Oh, haven't I, though! Yes, but I have; and I have signed it with my name. Oh! I've been and done it this time, Geraldine; and won't there be a row in the building when my father comes to know!'

'What on earth possessed you to do such a piece of madness? Why did not Mr. Aquitaine take you home long ago, or stay here to look after you? Why did not you tell me what you were going to do?'

'Well, it's partly your fault,' said Melissa, flashing up; 'and so you are bound to get me out of this fix.'

'Partly my fault?'

'Yes, I say it is your fault; and it's *all* your fault. You are to blame for the whole of it. Why did you go on so—condemning Mr. Montana and running him down? You might have known it would have set me off wild in the other direction.'

'But I did not condemn him,' said Geraldine; 'I did not run him down.'

'You sat and listened, and looked on approvingly, while Mr. Trescoe—that fool, that dull, silly, weak creature!—yes, you listened while he ran Mr. Montana down; and you agreed with him, and you agreed with his doubts, and you agreed with everything that was said against him; and what was I to do? Of course I wasn't going to stand that. I resolved to show him that I, at least, did not doubt him; and there—that's why I did it; and you are to blame, and you must get me out of it now.'

'What can we do?' Geraldine said, almost in despair.

'I don't know,' said Melissa, sitting down now rather composedly, and nursing one knee between her two little hands; 'but you have got me into it, Geraldine, and you must get me out of it, and that's all about it.'

Geraldine thought the matter out as well as she could, her face puckered up with anxiety, and resting her chin upon her hand. A general on the eve of a difficult campaign, or a judge perplexed by some most exasperating point of law, could hardly have had a brain more perturbed by the difficulties and responsibilities of the hour. 'When did you write this letter?' she said at last.

'Oh, I don't know; about an hour ago, or it may be an hour and a half perhaps, or two hours; before luncheon—before papa came and talked to me. He has been talking to me. Did

I, or didn't I, tell you? Yes, he has been advising me and talking to me; and I know, if he found out this, things would be bad. It must have been an hour and a half ago, I think.'

'How did you get it sent to the post?'

'Well, I had it in my pocket when Sydney and I walked out to-day, and I just stayed a moment behind her at the corner of the street, and dropped it into the letter-box there.'

'Good gracious!' said Geraldine; 'what deceits and dodges one gets into!'

'Never mind what one gets into,' said Melissa; 'get me out of this now; that is more to the point.'

A wave of inspiration tossed up a purpose in Geraldine's mind.

'He may not have got it yet,' she said. 'We'll get it back from him, Melissa. I will go myself and get it back.'

'Oh, will you?' said Melissa, her eyes brightening up with hope and wonder. 'Will you have courage? Will you do it? Have you the nerve? I know you American girls will do anything; but can you do this?'

'I have nerve enough when I want to help a friend out of trouble,' said Geraldine; 'and I am not an American girl, Melissa, but I have learnt in America not to be ashamed or afraid of doing anything that is right. Girls in America are brave and free, and they are only taught to be afraid or ashamed of doing what is wrong.'

Then she stopped and began to feel rather ashamed of preaching at the poor little offender before her, but Melissa had hurt her by speaking of American girls as if they were girls who would do anything without regard for the proprieties.

'Yes, I will go,' Geraldine said again; 'we may be beforehand with the postman. Mr. Montana may not have got it.'

'If I could get it back again,' Melissa murmured piteously—'if I could only be certain that he had not read it, I am sure, Geraldine, I'd never do such a thing again; at least, I think I wouldn't; oh, indeed I do; I think I would not do it again.'

'I am sure you would not do it again,' said Geraldine. 'I would not do what I am going to do for you if I thought there was the least chance of your attempting such a thing any more.'

'Well, don't preach, there's a good girl,' said Melissa; 'I never could stand being preached at.'

Even in all her gratitude to Geraldine she could not subdue her mutinous inclination, and would not be preached at.

'I am afraid preaching does not do you good,' Geraldine said softly; 'perhaps you are not much worse than many of your

neighbours in that way. Anyhow, Melissa, I will run the risk. I will go to Mr. Montana. I will not trust to sending anybody. Nobody must know about this but you and I and he; and if I can, he shan't know your name.'

'Yes,' Geraldine thought to herself, 'I will go. What does it matter? It is not anything wrong. What if people do think I am American in my ways, and that I venture to do things that English girls would not do? I don't care. This is not venturing very far, after all, to pull a friend out of trouble; and if anyone finds out that I have done so, and is angry with me, or thinks badly of me, well—I can bear it—I'd do more than that to help poor Melissa.'

One hour and a half in the day Montana kept for himself and his few special friends. That was the time from half-past five to seven. The general public were shut out at that time, and Montana shut in. Those who were able to see him then were the favoured intimates to whom he had given the *consigne*, and who would come and talk to him in a friendly way about anything or nothing, and smoke a cigar with him. It was a great privilege to be amongst those who were admitted to Montana's hour of privacy. Montana took care to give admittance in such a manner as to make it evident that he was not distributing his favours only amongst the powerful and the great. Some of his poorest and humblest followers had the pass-word. Women as well as men were privileged. It was not long before Lady Vanessa established for herself and her husband the right of entry, and she sometimes came even without her husband, and talked with Montana and whoever happened to be there, and occasionally smoked a cigarette in her affable and familiar way. Young men who could get admittance at this special hour were proud of it, and talked of it a great deal amongst their friends.

Now, as chance would have it, this was the very time of the day when Geraldine had to make her visit to Montana. She thought she could get to his place easily, speak to him and get back again before it was time to dress for dinner. There was not a moment to be lost. She hurried downstairs, and went her way with heart high beating, it must be owned, but very resolute and quiet, determined to put the thing through, and not to let poor Melissa get into trouble because of any fearfulness or hesitation on her part.

Montana had just entered his little reception-room to wait for any of his friends who might come, when he was told that a lady wanted to see him. He replied that he was engaged, and

at that hour could see no one. The servant came back with a still more pressing request from the lady to spare her a few moments.

Montana asked, would the lady favour him with her name?

Reply: 'No, the lady would rather not, but she could say that he knew her very well.'

Montana looked at his watch, and saw that it yet wanted a minute or two of half-past five. Perhaps nobody would come very punctually. He might get rid of this unusual visitor in good time. 'Let the lady be shown up.' To his surprise, when she came into the room, he saw that it was Geraldine Rowan. But if he felt surprised, as he certainly did, he took care not to show it. He advanced to Miss Rowan with so easy and friendly a manner that she might have thought he was expecting her, and a looker-on might have supposed that her visit to him was the most ordinary and natural thing in the world.

Geraldine felt greatly reassured by this, and there was something so gracious and kindly in his smile that she began to understand dimly what was the meaning of the sort of fascination he seemed to exercise over so many men and women. They shook hands; Montana placed a chair for her, and said he was glad to see her, in a tone admirably suited to encourage confidential communication, although neither in tone nor in look did he show the slightest appearance of one who expects a confidence, or who regards the whole meeting as other than a commonplace friendly visit.

'Mr. Montana,' she said—and then she stopped for want of breath, and for a moment it seemed as if she really could get no words to go on with. Then she braced herself, and tried to find deliberate utterance. 'Mr. Montana,' she went on, 'you will think it very strange that I have come in this way to see you, and I think it strange myself.'

Montana only said, 'I am not likely to think anything strange that Miss Rowan does; and besides, strange things are often the right things, and I am sure whatever you do is done with a right purpose.'

'Thank you,' she said, and she really felt grateful to him for the manner in which he had relieved her of some of her embarrassment. 'I shan't keep you long.'

'That,' said Montana, 'is an ungracious beginning.'

'I shan't keep you long,' she repeated. 'I have come to ask you a favour, Mr. Montana. Perhaps it is an act of justice. It ought to be. But I don't know, and I am quite willing to put it as a favour.'

'I only hope it is something very hard to do, so that I may do it, and show that I am not unworthy of being asked.'

'It is not hard to do. It ought not to be hard to any man, and I should think it ought to be least of all hard to you. I put it as a favour. I don't come to you willingly, Mr. Montana; I don't admire you, and you know it. I don't believe in you, whatever other people may do.'

'You will believe in me one day,' said Montana composedly, 'and you will help me, and join with me. That is as certain as the rising of the sun to-morrow.'

She looked at him with something like contempt. 'I don't believe in you now, at all events,' she said, 'and I am more than ever convinced that I am right by things that have lately happened. I don't believe you are what you say you are; at least, I believe you are what you say you are not.'

Geraldine looked straight into his eyes to see if any sign of embarrassment or surprise might be found there as she spoke these audacious words. But the eyes returned her look with that calm, grave, sweet expression which was always in them. 'If Montana is an impostor,' she thought, 'he is well made up for his part.' The truth was, that Montana had prepared himself again and again for every possible utterance of this kind from every conceivable person, and was as little likely to be put out now as a trained actor on the stage is put out by the speech of the theatric opponent which gives him his cue.

'Tell me,' he said gently, 'what is the favour you want of me? if it is in my power, you shall have it all the same, whether you believe in me or not. How you act towards me could not be any guide for my acting towards you. The less you think well of me, the greater is my anxiety to show that I don't deserve to be thought badly of.'

'Well,' she said, 'I want to get from you a letter which you must have got to-day. I want to get it from you unread, if you will give it to me; but read or not, I want it back again.'

Montana now looked a little surprised. 'Certainly,' he said, 'you shall have any letter that I have received which concerns you in the least. But I have read scores of letters this morning already, and I don't remember one of them in which you could have the slightest interest. However, I give you my promise that you shall have any of them, or all of them, if you are in the least inclined.'

'Perhaps you have not read this one yet?' she said. 'You have letters still remaining, perhaps, unopened?'

'A good many,' he said with a melancholy smile. 'The opening and reading of letters is one of the weariest occupations of my life. I sometimes feel inclined to wish there were no post-office. See, there is a heap of letters already lying on this table by the last post, which my secretary has not touched as yet, nor I. Will you look amongst them? Do you know the handwriting of the letter you speak of?'—'I do, very well.'

'Is the writer a man or a woman?'

'It is a girl,' Geraldine said, with some hesitation.

One little gleam of curiosity and surprise did actually come into Montana's eyes. 'Will you tell me,' he said, 'why you want the letter back?'

'Oh no,' she said, 'and that is another favour; pray don't ask me. I beg of you not to ask that. Think I am unreasonable; think I am ridiculous; think I am out of my senses, if you like, but grant me this favour. Do let me have the letter, and don't ask me anything about it.'

'By all means,' Montana answered. 'Look amongst these letters, and take away any one you like.'

Geraldine tried to be cool and composed. She turned the pile of letters over and over, and sought out the one she fain would have. It was not there. No address was written in any handwriting in the least like that of Melissa Aquitaine.

'It has not come yet,' she said, 'but it will come. I don't know what to do.'

'What is this terrible letter?' Montana asked. 'You see, if you give me any description by which I may know it, I can look for it, and will take care that it is sent to you. Or would you rather come here after the next post or two and try again?'

'Oh no,' she said. 'I can't come again.'

'Can't you give me any idea of what sort of letter it is, or what it is about? Surely you may trust me so far as that?'

'I must,' said Geraldine, rather dolefully. 'I must trust you. I can't come again to-day, and the letter will certainly reach you some time to-day. It is a letter in the handwriting of a girl who has written you ever so many letters before—letters of admiration, and homage, and that sort of thing. You may perhaps know the handwriting; I beg you, if you do, to send me back that letter unopened.'

'I don't remember any one handwriting in particular; I receive a great many letters from women, and let me say, Miss Rowan, not a few of them are foolish letters. Do I know the writer of this letter?'

'Pray don't ask me anything,' said Geraldine. 'The writer of the letter now wishes she had not written this last one, and I want to get it back.'

Montana stopped for a moment, and a sudden expression came over his face, which made him look as if he had grown ten years younger. 'Can it be possible,' he said, 'that you have yourself written these letters, Geraldine, and that you now repent, and want this one back? If this is so, pray, pray let me recall my promise.'

'I have not written the letters,' said Geraldine, with a scornful ring in her voice; 'I never wrote such letters, and I should never be likely to write any such—to you, of all men in the world. The foolish child who did write them has at last been wild enough to tell you her name, and I want you not to know her name, and if you will give me back the letter—well—I shall thank you, and say that you are perhaps better than I thought.' She got out the words slowly, one by one, with difficulty and hesitation. 'But if you won't give it back to me, then I can't help it—keep it—I have no more to say.'

'You are angry with me,' Montana said gently, 'and I don't wonder. I was wrong to think that you could have written such letters. I know you would not; much as I want you to think well of me, I don't want you to express a kindly feeling in such a way as that. You shall have the letter, of course. I don't want to read the poor girl's nonsense. I don't want to know her name, or who she is. I should give her good advice, if I knew her, and try to reason her out of her folly. What do I care about the admiration and the rapture of women? I would rather have one kindly word from you than the homage of all the other women in the world.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

ILL MET BY MOONLIGHT.

What Geraldine might have said in answer to this declaration she did not herself know, for at that moment the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Lady Vanessa Barnes and her husband. The tall, handsome lady seemed to fill the pretty little reception-room as she came in with her strong, graceful movement, every motion as she walked seeming to tell of careless, unconscious strength, and her face lighted with animation, high spirits, and curiosity.

Mr. Barnes, her husband, was a young-looking, slender, some-

what timid man, who always seemed as if he were trying to escape from notice behind his wife's petticoats. He was a man of intelligence and ability in his own way, a keen financier, a reader, and almost a scholar; but his business in life now was to be overshadowed by his wife, and it was his pleasure too. To rest in her shade made him happy. She was very fond of him, and he knew it, and liked her to have her own way in everything.

Lady Vanessa fixed her eyes inquiringly on Geraldine, and after the interchange of a few words with Montana, she turned to the girl, and said:

'I always remember any face I see, and I have seen this young lady somewhere—at the Church of Free Souls, or whatever you call it. Am I right, Mr. Montana?'

Montana presented Geraldine. He was glad Lady Vanessa had come. Her coming prevented Geraldine from replying to his declaration. It compelled her to receive it without a protest. That was something.

'Yes, I thought as much,' said Lady Vanessa. 'You are the young American girl, ain't you?—some one told me you were.'

'No,' said Geraldine, 'I am not an American. I have lived in America, but I am an Irish girl.' She usually had to explain about three times a day that, although she had lived for many years in America, she was nevertheless not an American.

'Oh, an Irish girl?' Lady Vanessa said. 'I see—yes, exactly; that is why you are so good-looking. They say all Irish girls are good-looking, don't they?'

'I don't know,' said Geraldine.

'But you know that you are good-looking,' said the pertinacious lady.

'I don't,' said Geraldine.

'Come, now, is that true?'

'Quite true,' replied Geraldine boldly. 'There are different ideas about good looks; I don't admire myself.'

'Oh, you don't? Mr. Montana does, I dare say.'

'Everyone does,' said Montana. 'All who know Miss Rowan admire her.'

'Well, I am sure I admire you already,' Lady Vanessa said. 'But where did you get that pensive look in your eyes? You look as if you were dreaming.'

'I am short-sighted, and I suppose that gives one a dreamy look.'

'Then I wish I were short-sighted,' said Lady Vanessa.

'That is exactly the sort of look I should like to have. Don't you think so, Albert? Do look at Miss Rowan's eyes, dear. Isn't there a wonderful expression in them?'

Mr. Barnes looked, not very boldly, into Miss Rowan's eyes, and said, 'Yes, there was. Quite so. Exactly.'

Geraldine felt embarrassed—an unusual thing for her. She was not embarrassed in the least by Lady Vanessa's questions or compliments, but by the whole situation, by Montana's recent words, by the knowledge that the moments were passing rapidly away—so rapidly, that she must get back soon—and that she had not got the letter.

She must go. Other visitors would come, and it was impossible that Montana could now satisfy her request. She rose to go. She cast an appealing look at him. Despite his recent declaration, she had to appeal to him still, for Melissa's sake. She hoped he would understand her look, and come with her out of the room, and let her exchange another word with him. He did understand her, for he rose to accompany her to the stairs. But as she was going, Lady Vanessa stopped her with a friendly hand.

'Look here, my dear young woman,' she said, drawing Geraldine aside; 'I must give you a piece of advice; you are from America, and girls do as they like there. You don't understand our ways. You must not come all alone here paying visits to handsome men like Mr. Montana. That will never do. People will talk about you. Don't be offended. I give you the advice for your good.'

'I am much obliged to you,' said Geraldine coldly. 'I think I can take care of myself.'

'Awfully proud,' said Lady Vanessa. 'I see; all right, dear; I mean no offence.'

'Indeed, I have not taken offence,' said Geraldine, recovering herself, and pleased with the frank ways of the eccentric lady.

'You see, I am older than you,' said Vanessa.

'I don't think you are, really,' Geraldine answered, 'if it comes to that.'

'Well, I'm older in experience; I'm married; I am well up in all the ways of our world here, and I know what people would say. I never care what they say of me, to be sure; but that's a different thing.'

'Why is it so different?' Geraldine was too ingenuous even to suspect that Lady Vanessa meant to say, 'Because I am a great lady and you are not.'

'Oh, well,' and Vanessa laughed; 'because, don't you see? I have caught my fish, child, and you haven't—at least, you haven't hooked him yet. That's how it is.' She gave her husband's arm a good-humoured squeeze. 'This is my fish, don't you see? I've hooked him.'

Then Lady Vanessa and Geraldine both became aware that a new visitor was entering the room—a visitor of a very different class from any to which the Duchess of Magdiel's daughter was accustomed.

We have already spoken of the wrecks coming to the shore, Montana being the shore to which they drifted. Amongst the wrecks which thus came floating towards him was that of a family in the East End, the family of a fanatical poor workingman, a member of a small odd sect of Peculiar People, or suchlike, who in an early chapter of this book has been described as attending Montana's first lecture in London, and going up to him and making his acquaintance—what time the Duke of Magdiel was coldly repulsed. Poor Matthew Starr was a fanatic of benevolence, a furious devotee of equality and of purity, a virtue's Quixote in the East End of London, and in a ragged moleskin jacket. A waif and wreck of the ancient Chartist days, he had spent his life working hard, rising early, resting late, suffering want, weariness, disappointment after disappointment, seeing the light of every hope go out one after the other, and still living and feeding on his faith in an impossible future of happiness and equality and goodness for the living world. He might in other days have been a martyr—perhaps a Stylites. Fate had sentenced him to drudge in Whitechapel, to marry a stupid little girl who in the end took to drink and died of drink, to have a crowd of children depending on him, and whom he had to trust to the nursing of chance, or strangers, or each other, or anybody, during his long daily work. They grew up, and most of them turned out as he would not have them. Two of the boys went into the army, and he hated soldiering with a passionate intensity of hatred. War was to him only murder on a large scale. A soldier he regarded simply as Cain in a red coat. Another son became a servant, a footman; and if there was anything which Matthew Starr hated almost as much as a soldier, it was a lacquey. Two of his daughters had become domestic servants. For one of them he had succeeded in getting a place in a milliner's shop, and she presently went terribly astray and wandered the streets at nights, and poor Matthew Starr was as much of a fanatic for purity in women as he was for peace and good-

will in men. Still, he remained hoping on, believing in the good time coming, passionately longing for some new world and new life under other influences and other skies. When Montana came to London and divulged his scheme, it seemed to Starr as if heaven were opening to him—at least, as if heaven had sent to him this man with a special commission to lead him out of the darkness and despair of his London life into light and happiness.

Montana smiled on him with that sweetness which passed with so many of his admirers for an almost divine beneficence. But, to do him justice, he did not merely smile; he was really kind to poor Starr. The one thing that the old man would most wish to have done for him, Montana did. He found out the lost daughter, and talked to her gravely and sweetly, brought her back to her father's house, and undertook to find for her some fitting occupation until they could go out to the happy new world where all was to be well. Not without trouble did Montana get Starr to receive his daughter back again. All his authority was needed to enforce it, though when it was done the man seemed to soften to the girl, even more than might have been expected, and to cling to her with new passion of love and hope. As for her, she soon wearied of the narrow miserable home where she hated to live. She hated a life of monotony. She was only kept from tearing herself away and going back to her old ways by her belief in the happiness that was in store for them when they should become members of Montana's new colony. Montana had often pictured for them the life that was to be in that new place, where all were to be equals, and all were to have work enough, and only enough, and ample leisure, and means to live, and amusement, and no care; no mists and fogs and cold skies over them, no mud under their feet, no dark, dull houses around them, no tenements crowded with hard-working, hard-drinking lodgers and screaming children. The man and the girl lived on the hope of this new life, he because it was to be a life of equality, and purity, and progress, and she because it was to relieve her from the monotony of her present existence, and because it offered her some prospect of variety, and colour, and amusement, and perhaps—for she never followed very closely Montana's somewhat vague descriptions—some promise of money, fine clothes, and frequent visits to a theatre.

Mr. Starr was for modesty drawing back when he saw the ladies, but Montana called to him to come in, and he entered with a look half timid, half defiant, at once shy and fierce—awk-

ward in the presence of the well-dressed women, angry with himself at the bare idea that they should think he was awkward, and determined to make it plain that he was not. He looked with a glance of especial defiance at the tall and imposing Lady Vanessa; and as she returned his look with an expression of amused curiosity, he set her down at once as an enemy. He turned a sharp glance upon Geraldine; but as her eyes only looked softly into his with the dreamy expression of short sight, he assumed that she felt rather kindly towards humanity in general, and was inclined to like her.

'I am glad to see you, Starr,' said Montana, shaking hands with the old man cordially, and favouring him with a specially sweet smile. 'How is Fanny? does she get to like her work any better?'

'Fanny don't like her work,' and Mr. Starr shook his head; 'she don't get reconciled to it, somehow; she don't like the being up early and down late. She don't like the regular hours. She's not been used to it, poor thing, so long as I have. The unicorn, Mr. Montana, don't like to abide by the crib, does he?'

There was a certain half-educated dignity about Mr. Starr's style of speech and about his fanatical freethinking. He read the Bible a good deal, and admired its language and its illustrations. He read Shakespeare and Milton, and Paine's 'Rights of Man,' and the 'Vestiges of Creation,' and the essays and speeches of Mr. W. J. Fox.

'No,' said Montana, 'she is young. We must make allowance for her, Starr, must we not?'

'We must, Mr. Montana, and we do. I am sure you do. We must get her away out of this. When we have her out in your grand new settlement under the bright skies, and where there is a life to live for, I think she will settle down then and be a fine woman yet; I do. But I long for it. When is it to be, Mr. Montana? Do tell me!'

'Soon,' said Montana, 'but not too soon. We cannot hurry the movement of events.'

This was oracular, and it was all that Starr could get to satisfy him. He sighed. Then, suddenly looked up, he asked, 'There ain't no delay, Mr. Montana? no putting off? nothing you did not expect?'

'All,' said Montana, 'is going on exactly as I expected and arranged.'

'Thank God!' said Starr. 'But I am disturbing these ladies,' he added, for he saw that Lady Vanessa seemed about to go, 'I am intruding, maybe? I will go.'

'Pray don't go for me,' said Lady Vanessa; 'I am going myself.'

'This is a friend of mine, Lady Vanessa,' said Montana; 'Mr. Starr, an honest, capable working man a credit to his order a man who has educated himself, and has had a hard struggle with life and fate.'

'I am glad to know you,' said Lady Vanessa good-humouredly; and her husband expressed equal pleasure in knowing Mr. Starr, but he thought to himself that surely Montana was an odd sort of person.

'I don't think you are glad to know me,' said Starr, addressing Lady Vanessa, and ignoring Mr. Barnes altogether. 'You are a fine lady—a great lady, I dare say. What should you be glad to know me for? You are the enemy of my class. You would be my enemy if I was worth it, but I am not.'

'Starr, my dear friend!' Montana said, interposing.

'Look here, you know——' said Mr. Barnes.

'All right, Albert; never mind,' said Lady Vanessa. 'I don't mind in the least. I like our friend to have his say out. Why shouldn't he? Well, Mr. Starr, why do you call me the enemy of your class? I don't want to be anybody's enemy, I am sure; and I don't think I am—except my own, perhaps, sometimes.'

'You and your class are our enemies,' said Starr. 'You keep us down, and grind us, and crush us, and keep us from our rights. You have the land and the money, and you live in fine houses, and you wear grand clothes,' and he waved his hand towards Lady Vanessa as if he were specially pointing attention to her garments, and calling the world to witness that his words were true; 'and we starve, we work morning and night, and our girls suffer—they go wrong, maybe.'

'I like arguing,' said Lady Vanessa. 'One does not often find anybody to argue so stoutly as our friend. But now, look here, my good man; I couldn't help being born what I was any more than you. What good would it do to you if I didn't wear good clothes? You wouldn't take money, I suppose, if I offered it to you?'

'No,' he said; 'no man ever dared to offer me charity, and I hope a woman wouldn't do it.'

'Then, what could we do for you?' she asked bluntly.

'Anyhow, you have all the money and all the good things, and you keep them; and we have no share, and we have as good a right to them as you; and we work, and you do nothing I don't mind the Queen—I don't find fault with the Queen.'

'Well, that's considerate,' said Lady Vanessa, with a laugh.

'No, I don't; she has some work to do, anyhow. She has business set out for her; she has duties, and she does them. I don't say that I think the country wants such duties; but they are given to her, and she does them, and she has a right to her pay; and I am told she is a good woman, and minds her children —or did mind them when they were young. I find fault with you—you and your lot. You have no duties. If you had, you wouldn't do them. You have nothing to do but take your money and spend it.'

'You ought to like this young lady,' said Lady Vanessa. 'She is a Republican; she comes from America.'

'Do you come from America, ma'am?' said the old Chartist, turning to Geraldine, his eyes suddenly lighting.

'I have lived a long time in America,' she said. 'I don't know whether I am Republican or not. I am Republican for America, certainly; but I have not thought over the matter very much for any other place, Mr. Starr. Are you a Republican?'

'Oh yes!' he said. 'I live for Republican principles. I'd like to die for them. I live in the hope of being one day in a Republic—in Mr. Montana's new Republic, and with him for president, and us all equal. I shouldn't care to live another hour if it were not for that and for Fanny—that's my daughter, miss.'

'Is she ill?' asked Geraldine; because she fancied, from his manner of answering Montana, that she must be.

'She is ill, ma'am; not in the bodily sense so much—although she is delicate a good deal—but she is restless; she is unhappy.'

'May I go and see her?' Geraldine asked, in her usual impulsive way.

Mr. Starr looked uneasily at Montana. 'Well, I'm sure I don't know, miss,' he said. 'Maybe it would not be right of me to bring you to see her.'

'Oh, if it's anything like fever or that, I don't care a straw—I mean, I'm not afraid. I have done all sorts of nursing; I never got any harm.'

'No, miss; no, it is not that; she is not sick in that way. But I don't think Mr. Montana would like you to know her, perhaps.'

'But,' said Lady Vanessa, 'this young lady is a Republican and a Democrat, don't you know. She hasn't any of my odious class prejudices; she is not your daughter's enemy. I suppose it would be no use for me to ask to go to see her. But I would, if you would let me.'

Mr. Starr looked into the great lady's eyes, and really saw only a kind of blunt good-nature there.

'Well,' he said, 'I don't believe you are half as bad as you seem. I dare say you would do a good turn for anyone; and it isn't your fault, as you say, that you were born a curse to the world—I mean your class, ma'am, not yourself. I dare say you are a kind-hearted, honest sort of woman. But it was not about that I was thinking when I did not want this young lady to come to see us. You are not married, ma'am—miss, I mean?'

'No,' said Geraldine. 'What would that matter?'

'Are you married, my lady?' he got out the title with great difficulty, and as an absolute concession to Lady Vanessa's personal good-nature.

Yes, Vanessa assured him that she was married.

'Well, I don't know,' he said; 'you are both of you very kind; but I can't say. I'll ask Mr. Montana about it.'

'And Mr. Montana will let me know,' said Lady Vanessa; 'and if there is anything at all I can do to show that I am not the enemy of your class, Mr. Starr, I'll do it.'

Lady Vanessa and her husband went away. Some other people came in.

'I will go to see your daughter, Mr. Starr,' said Geraldine, 'if you will give me your address. I shan't wait to ask Mr. Montana. Republican girls from America, you know, don't ask anyone's authority to do anything.'

It was not possible for Geraldine to wait any longer. She was palpitating with anxiety at having to wait so long; and she had still to speak again with Montana about Melissa's hapless letter. When she left the room, Montana went with her. In her anxiety about Melissa, she had almost forgotten the very direct avowal of admiration and something more which he had so lately made to her.

But Montana was calculating upon all her movements. He knew what an advantage he must have in the fact that she had, as it were, to condone his declaration of love, and to talk with him in the closest confidence after he had made it and she had heard it. Even if he had now in his hand the letter which she was so anxious to get, he would not give it to her just yet. It had still a purpose to serve.

When they got outside the door, she asked: 'What *am* I to do, Mr. Montana? You cannot give me this letter——'

'I have not got it,' he said. 'Can you wait? You might wait in one of the other rooms. Nobody will come there; and

as the letters come, they shall be shown to you. You can wait in the room where the letters are always brought.'

'I can't wait,' she said. 'It is impossible. I must go back.'

'Shall I come and see you to-night, and bring the letters with me? I am going to dine out. I will call afterwards and ask for you.'

She thought over this for a moment. 'That would never do,' she said. 'I should not be able to see you without making people wonder and suspect something.'

'Then, will you come and see me here late to-night? It does not matter. We understand each other. Nobody will know.'

'Oh, I couldn't do that,' said Geraldine. 'That is beyond even me, Mr. Montana.'

'Can I send you the letter?' he asked. Then he stopped suddenly and said, 'Of course I can't do that; I don't know the handwriting. Besides, if it really is so serious a thing as you think, we had better not let anybody into it. Will you send your maid here at ten o'clock to-night? The last post will have come in, and the letter must be here then, if it is to come at all.'

'I haven't a maid,' said Geraldine. 'And even if I had, I should not like to let her into all this. I don't want to bring other eyes on me. I couldn't send Miss Marion's maid or—anybody's.'

She was going to say 'Miss Aquitaine's,' but stopped so significantly that Montana, if he had been the dullest person in the world, could not have failed to know why she forbore to utter that name. He had not guessed before who his mysterious correspondent was. It was clear as light to him now.

'I can only think of one other plan, Miss Rowan. Don't be alarmed. It may look very dreadful, but it is not. I shall leave the place where I am dining, early, and get back here, and get whatever letters there are in anything at all like a woman's handwriting. I shall walk into Berkeley Square. Will you find some way to come there at ten o'clock, and you shall see the letters and take the one you want? Come, I can think of nothing else but this. It is not a bad plan, and, after all, mysterious meetings are best carried on in the public street. Don't be afraid. If you really are anxious about the letter, this is the only thing to do.'

Geraldine turned it over in her mind as quickly as she could. She thought it did seem the best thing to do. To call again

the next day, or to get him to send her letter after letter on the chance of its being the right one, or to wait any longer for any cause, seemed most unwise. In the depths of her heart, she did not trust Montana far enough to leave the letter too long in his possession. 'I have to get it,' she thought to herself. 'I have set my heart upon it, and I will not stick at a trifle to succeed.'

'Yes, Mr. Montana,' she said at once, and quite composedly, 'I will see you in Berkeley Square at ten to-night. Good-bye, until then.'

She was not five minutes from Captain Marion's house, and we may be sure she lost no time on the way. She exchanged a hasty word with Melissa.

'It will be all right, Melissa. I haven't got it yet——'

'Oh, you haven't got it?' Melissa said discontentedly. 'I thought as much!'

'But I shall get it, you sceptical little girl; you shall have it to-night.'

It was only when she got to her own room, and was hastily dressing for dinner, that Geraldine began to reflect on the wild escapade she was engaging in, and on the fact that Montana had made to her something very like a declaration of love, and that she had not repelled it.

Mr. Longfellow, in his charming 'Hyperion,' compares something or some line of argument to certain roads in the wilder parts of America, which begin broad and clear, and gradually get narrower and narrower, becoming a mere footpath through a forest, and at last dwindling away into a squirrel track and running up a tree. Curzon Street, Mayfair, is not a little like a road of that description. Opening broadly enough out of Seamore Place, it goes a stately way about as far as Queen Street, and then it gets smaller, dwindling down after it passes Clarges Street, and wandering through little shops and stables, until at last, when it has crossed Bolton Street, behold, it suddenly becomes Lansdowne Passage, a narrow paved walk between two high walls, which may perhaps, for the purpose of our comparison, be accepted as the equivalent of the squirrel track. Lansdowne Passage has the early Georges in every brick and paving-stone. It is only a few feet in width. It is paved like the floor of a dungeon, and the walls that gird it are of appalling height. There is a little gate at each end, a sort of little turnstile which does not turn, and there is a little flight of steps at the end that opens upon Berkeley Street just where Berkeley Street touches

Berkeley Square; and as one passes through, he might fancy he hears the rustle of the dresses of the prim ladies in the early Georgian time, and sees the stiff stocks and pigtails belonging to the military heroes of that period. Lansdowne Passage tells of the Georges as Kensington in some of its old quarters tells of Queen Anne, or the Tower reminds us of Mary and Elizabeth and Jane Grey.

Geraldine Rowan, although, as we have said more than once before, delighting in all the associations of early London, and loving to find everywhere some memory of a great name, or a past day, or a pretty story, was not concerning herself much about Georgian times or any reminiscences that might properly belong to the little pavement she trod when she entered Lansdowne Passage at ten o'clock that quiet beautiful summer night. She was only thinking of the venturous expedition she had come on, and the strange risk she ran. This was a very different thing from calling on Mr. Montana in the bright bustling hours before dinner. This expedition was under cover of night, although a night well moonlighted, and there was mystery about it. It had the air of an assignation. It could hardly be justified in the eyes of any sober and prudent elders whatever. Hardly, she thought, would her own mother have easily pardoned her for doing such a thing as this. And yet, what else could she do? She had thought the matter over again and again, and there seemed no way out of it but to make this venture. There was no other hope of extracting poor Melissa from a difficulty that indeed might come to be a great danger in the end. Geraldine felt that she was really running a risk, possibly making a sacrifice, to help her friend, and that thought made her only feel proud and resolute. She would not turn back now. She would see the thing out, come of it what might.

Mr. Montana was punctual. Geraldine had hardly emerged from Lansdowne Passage into Berkeley Street when she saw that he was waiting at the corner of Berkeley Square. He came towards her at once. Just at that moment it so happened that Lady Vanessa Barnes was returning in her brougham from a dinner-party, and on her way to spend the evening in one of the streets near Berkeley Square. Montana had sat next her at dinner that day, and she had particularly asked him to come and talk to her in the drawing-room afterwards. He had excused himself, saying he had to leave early, and had not appeared in the drawing-room at all. Lady Vanessa was vexed, found the affair dull, and left early. Now she saw Montana standing at the

corner of Berkeley Square as if waiting for some one. She made her coachman drive slowly; she was a young woman endowed with much curiosity, and not always particularly scrupulous about the gratification of it. In a moment she saw a woman come out through the gate of Lansdowne Passage, and saw Montana hasten to meet her. They began to walk slowly round the square, on the path by the gardens, where a great plaster nymph or naiad, or some such personage, is doing something with an urn. Lady Vanessa drove round the square two or three times, and still saw them walking slowly, apparently in deep and confidential conversation. Once the girl looked round, and might have seen Lady Vanessa, but that Lady Vanessa drew back. Lady Vanessa saw her plainly. She was astonished, shocked, highly amused.

'So this is my little American girl,' she thought as she drove away, 'who is so highly independent of the world's ways, and knows so well how to take care of herself; and this is my saintly Montana! I shall open that girl's eyes a little, and let her see what a silly thing she is doing. I think my saint might have more sense, at his time of life, than to make midnight assignations with a girl in a square in London.'

It was not exactly midnight, but midnight would do well enough for Lady Vanessa.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN BERKELEY SQUARE.

MONTANA had seen Lady Vanessa just as well as she had seen him. His quick eyes were not likely to miss her. He was looking out for possible observers of himself and Geraldine in their late evening walk; and when he heard the wheels of a carriage, he naturally looked that way. He saw Lady Vanessa, and saw that she had seen them, and he was very glad of it. It exactly suited his purpose. She was just the person whom he should have liked to see Miss Rowan and himself together, in that strange mysterious way, towards nightfall. When Geraldine met him first, he led her at once to the path beside the railings of the Square gardens. 'Nobody will see us here,' he said; 'this place is very quiet. Come; here are the letters. Luckily for us, the moon shines brightly enough, and you can easily find the one you want.'

He put a little bundle of letters into Geraldine's hand. She turned them hastily over, and was not long in finding the one

she sought for. She felt her mind immensely relieved. She had got it now, and poor Melissa's secret was safe.

'I am really grateful to you, Mr. Montana,' she said, and she felt all she said. 'You have relieved me from a great anxiety, and enabled me to keep my word.'

'It was nothing,' he said; 'and even if I had read your friend's letter, it could not have fallen into better hands. I should have respected her confidence, even though I thought her foolish. But confess, Miss Rowan, that it is rather an odd freak of fate which makes so many women send me declarations of love that I don't want, while the only woman I care about repulses me.'

'I am much obliged to you, Mr. Montana,' she said again. 'I must go now.'

'No,' he said, 'you must not go just yet. We will walk round this place for a little. I want to talk to you. I am glad of the opportunity. I want to talk to you seriously. You are not a sentimental and foolish girl, and you are not afraid to hear the truth. I must go back again to what we talked of to-day.'

'Pray, don't go back to it,' she said. 'Don't let us say anything about it. Let me leave you now with this feeling of real gratitude to you. I have done a very odd and rash thing in coming to meet you here—don't make me sorry for doing it.'

'The thing is too serious,' Montana said quietly, 'for little scruples about forms and proprieties. I am glad to have you here alone, because I must speak again of what I began to speak to you about to-day when Lady Vanessa interrupted us. I must put it in plain words. I want you to be my wife, Miss Rowan. I think you are the woman in all the world who is fitted for me, and for the kind of work I have to do and the kind of life I have to lead; and so I put this to you plainly, and at once. I have no time for formal courtship and love-making, but I tell you that I am in love with you; and, much more than that, that I believe you are necessary to me and to my life, and I want you to be my wife. Don't answer at once. I want you to think this over. Every day you think it over, believe me, you will find yourself growing more and more reconciled to it.'

'Oh, it is impossible,' she said.

'Just let me tell you,' he said, 'some of the advantages—not that you much care about ordinary advantages, I know; but there are some things that every woman of spirit and sense must care about. You are not rich, I know: I have heard that your mother is poor. In the ordinary course, you would have perhaps a hard enough struggle with the world, and I hate the idea

of a girl like you, who is worthy of some high destiny, having to struggle with the world. Well, I am rich enough. I have a good deal of money. Money comes to me somehow, although I never went out of my way to get it. I never made money-getting any part of my ambition. But I am rich enough, and you could live in a way that would become you. And I am a success. I have made a name, and you would be known everywhere. More than all that, I have a great work to do, and you should share in it.'

'What is the use of all that?' Geraldine asked. 'It is thrown away on me, Mr. Montana. I don't even feel grateful for it, as I ought to do. It doesn't touch me. I am not afraid of a struggle with the world—not in the least. My mother would rather bear anything than that I married anyone for whom I did not feel——' and then she stopped, embarrassed.

'You may speak out as plainly as you wish,' he said, with his usual composure. 'You can't tell me anything I don't know already. I understand your feelings towards me quite well.'

'Then, if you do, we needn't talk any more about all this,' she said vehemently. 'If you know all that I feel, you can't want any answer from me. You know how little chance there is of my—of my doing what you wish me to do.'

'I know,' Montana calmly answered, 'that it is almost as certain as the rising of to-morrow's sun that you will be my wife.'

Montana thoroughly enjoyed this struggle between will and will. He did not by any means feel all the confidence in his ultimate success that he professed; but he well knew how much, in such a contest of resolve between man and woman, the man gains over the woman by the firm and repeated assertion that she cannot possibly escape him. In every act, and almost in every secret thought of Montana's, there was the same blending of reality and of play-acting. It was true that he had long convinced himself that the high destinies intended Geraldine Rowan to be his wife, and that she was needed to his career. So much was true—so much at least was the fanatic's dream; the rest was play-acting.

'I don't ask you for an answer now,' he said.

'Let me answer "No"!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, let me answer "No," once for all. I shall never give any other answer—unless I am bewitched. Do, Mr. Montana, I beg of you, take my answer now, and let us be done with all this. I never could care about you, Mr. Montana—to marry you, I mean. I must speak the truth: something in you repels me.'

'I know that quite well,' Montana answered, with his quiet smile. 'I know why it is. You shrink back for a while because you know you cannot help yourself.'

There did seem to be something of this kind in Geraldine's mind. Her dislike of him did always seem to be compounded with a certain dread that he would one day or other come to have an influence over her.

'I don't care,' he went on, 'for the sort of thing that commonplace people call love. I might have had enough of that. I don't care whether the feeling you have now to me is like that which any girl just out of school may have for some young man. I much prefer your feeling of repulsion and fear.'

'Fear? I have no fear. I am not afraid of you, Mr. Montana —no, not in the least. Why should I be?'

'Oh, yes; you *are* afraid. You are afraid that I shall prevail in the end. You know I shall. You can't escape, Geraldine. Do you remember the first night I saw you? It was on the deck of the steamer as we were leaving New York bay. The moment I saw you I said to myself, "That is the woman destined for me; there stands my wife."'

He took her hand, and held it.

For the first time she began to feel afraid of him. There was something in the expression of his eyes that compelled her to quail. It seemed as if he were becoming a reality instead of a sham. A soul was growing evident within him. Can one clearly realise what the sensation would be if, as he was looking on some theatric representation of a ghost, some poor magic-lantern illusion, some Polytechnic combination of glass and cunning reflection, the thing began, beyond doubt, to turn into a very ghost—a spectre with wan eyes and bodiless frame, the stars shining through it; an impossibility, yet a terrible, unmistakable reality, sending a shudder through every nerve of those who thus saw in their very presence the natural put on the supernatural? If one could imagine what the sensation of such awe-stricken spectators would be, he would have some idea of the feelings of Geraldine Rowan as her strange admirer held her hand and claimed her. The clasp with which he held her was not that which Geraldine would have supposed the grasp of a lover. It was not palpitating and tremulous, as with hope and fear and poetic tenderness. It was a cold, strong, stern grasp, quietly masterful. If Fate were to assume a bodily presence and take hold of a victim's hand, such perhaps would be its gripe.

What was that look in Montana's eyes? Geraldine had

always thought that, despite their lustrous darkness, Montana's eyes were shallow, merely glittering, soulless. Behind the shining surface there seemed to her to be nothing. Now, there was indeed something looking ominously out from a depth she had not thought of. Was it the light of passion, of unconquerable resolve, of high purpose? Was it—the thought passed quickly through her—the light of growing insanity? She felt as one might feel who, glancing carelessly into some cavern which he has passed and glanced into every day, becomes suddenly aware that his look is answered from the darkness this time by the burning eyes of a crouching tiger.

If Montana had known what was passing in Geraldine's mind, he could not have better chosen the words with which he broke the moment's silence. It was only a moment's silence, long as its strain seemed to Geraldine's overstrung nerves. The little second-hand of her watch had not made one round before Montana spoke.

'I believe there is a fate in this. It is your destiny, Geraldine, as well as mine: You can't escape it. I have tried many things, and never failed in anything yet. I shall not fail in this, believe me.'

She did not resist his holding her hand. Had he given a warm lover-like pressure, she would at once and instinctively have torn her hand away. But it was still the same quiet, unmoving grasp—like that of some instrument.

'I don't believe in talk about fate and destiny,' Geraldine said, keeping up her courage and composure as well as she could, but almost feeling as if she were beginning to have an uncomfortable belief in destiny all the same.

'Nor I,' Montana answered. 'I was only using the words that people commonly use. What I mean is, that I have always found a Higher Power directing me in every step I have taken, and I find it now. I never make plans and schemes as ordinary people do; I don't want them. I wait, and my course is directed for me. When the moment comes, I always know what to do. I am guided, I have been guided, to you from the first.'

'Oh, pray, Mr. Montana, don't talk of a special providence and heavenly guidance about such poor things as the fortunes of you and me. It makes me shudder; it sounds like blasphemy.'

'Do you think heaven is farther off from us now than it was in the days of the prophets?'

'No, I don't; but—I don't know. The same things don't

occur, and, anyhow, we are not prophets, you and I'—she suddenly wished she had not coupled herself and him together in the word 'we'—'at least, I am not a prophet, Mr. Montana, and I don't believe that you—I don't believe there are prophets now.'

'There is need of guidance for men and women now as much as ever—ay, far more need than there was in the days when men were known to have speech of angels. Well, you will think this over; there is time enough. Remember, it is a great destiny to which I am calling you. Yours will not be like the life of an ordinary woman; no, not even if she were a queen. What could a queen do like the work you will have to do? You will help to found a new civilisation. Your name will be famous all over the world. Perhaps you will be the first woman who ever vindicated for woman her true place in the great work of the world.'

'I don't believe I am worthy of any such high destiny,' Geraldine said, forcing a smile. 'You must find some one else, Mr. Montana; some woman who would be equal to such a place, and who would like it. I am not equal to it, and I shouldn't like it.'

'You don't yet know your own capabilities; whoever does until the moment comes?'

'The moment has come now for me to go away,' she said, 'and to get home. I ought not to have come. You have made me more sorry than ever that I did come; but I would venture a good deal for a friend. I ought to thank you, Mr. Montana, I know, and to feel grateful to you. I am sure many women would think this the very height of their ambition. But it is not for me, and I thank you as much as I can. I will thank you with all my heart and soul if you will only say that we shall not speak of this any more.'

'We need not speak of it very often,' he answered. 'I shall only remind you of it when the time seems to me fitting. I am satisfied; I know that every day's thought you give to this is sure to work for me, and I know that the more you try to avoid thinking of it, the more it will be in your mind. Now I don't mean to keep you any longer. Shall I see you safely to your door?'

'Oh, no; please don't. Let me go alone. I shall be quite safe.' She was already hurrying away, her whole horizon now being bounded by the mere hope of escape for that once.

He bade her 'Good-night' quietly.

She hurried home in terror and a kind of shame. She gave

Melissa her ransomed letter, and listened patiently to Melissa's interjections, partly of gratitude, partly of petulance, and made hardly any reply. She was inclined to say, more than once, 'You don't know what it may have cost me to get you back that foolish letter which you wrote in your absurd transport.' But she repressed herself and said nothing of the kind. She felt like one who is in possession of some guilty secret, like one who has entered into an alliance with unholy and supernatural agents, and for whom henceforward the real world loses its firm reality, by whom anything may be expected, however strange. She was bitterly angry with herself for not having more vehemently and finally rejected Montana's appeals, and broken off with him once and for all. But she had committed herself, she felt, in asking him to return Melissa's letter. She had put herself into a secret alliance with him, and from that moment had to treat him with consideration and the semblance of gratitude. What distressed her especially was the secret, inexplicable fear that perhaps she might not be able to hold herself aloof from him in the end. Perhaps he might get such a control over her, and so isolate her from other sympathies and other confidence, that she might actually have to yield and marry him in the end. She did not allow this terror to get hold of her without reasoning stoutly against it, and telling herself again and again that the time of witchcraft is passed, as well as the time of dragging young girls to the altar willy-nilly. She tried to laugh at her own fears; told herself that as long as she was determined not to marry Montana, Montana could not possibly marry her. But all the same, she saw how fate and her own fault, or her own quixotic generosity, or whatever it was, had brought her into a relationship with Montana which she could not at one time have believed possible; how he had made use of it to bring her and him into at least a momentary isolation from the rest of the world; and how she had more than once that night felt her spirit quail under the influence of that strange look which he fixed upon her. She had no friend to whom she could speak her mind, and the night was distressful to her, and she woke in the morning with a strange sensation, as if her old world had slipped away from her altogether and left her drifting in chaos.

CHAPTER XX.

A BREAKING-UP.

For several days Captain Marion and his household had heard nothing of Clement Hope. It seemed to Geraldine that his

absence and silence were ominous. It occurred to her that something must be the matter with Mr. Varlowe. She said as much to Captain Marion. Captain Marion was on the point of leaving town with Mr. Aquitaine for the northern city in which Aquitaine lived. They were going in obedience to a telegram from young Fanshawe. Fanshawe, when he heard of the incident in the Church of Free Souls, had naturally been aroused to keen interest and anxiety about it. If Mr. Varlowe's belief were not a delusion, then this Montana, this mysterious preacher and prophet and leader, must be the husband of his dead sister; and, if so, what a profound impostor he must be! Fanshawe was determined if possible to find out the truth of the matter, and he hurried off at once to the town of his birth—where pretty Miss Fanshawe had lived, and fallen in love, and married, and died. From that town he now sent to Captain Marion a telegram begging him to leave London and join him there at once, and Marion and Aquitaine were going this evening by the five o'clock train. The women were to be left alone, except for the companionship of Mr. Trescoe, who was a moody companion enough these last few days. Something had come over him. He was not like himself. He was silent, and sometimes almost stern, and now and then made Katherine short answers, which were new to her, and to which she did not reply with any of her usual spirit. There was something strange and cowed and fearful about Katherine's manner of late. She was wont to rule over her husband with the most undisguised sway. He used to live under a petticoat government open and avowed. His wife did not make the least affectation, as some judicious women do, of being the ruled while actually the ruler. She apparently took rather a pleasure in letting everybody see how completely her husband was her subject, and he seemed to enjoy his subjection. But things had changed these last few days. She was fearful: he was sullen.

'I wish we had not to go on this business,' Marion said. He and Aquitaine and Trescoe were together. 'I don't like it. It seems like a sort of detective job. It looks as if we suspected Montana of something.'

'And don't we?' Trescoe asked.

'I don't; and I'm sure, Frank, you don't either, if you would only let your true nature have its way. I wouldn't stir a step in this business of Fanshawe's, only that I want to have the satisfaction of seeing his suspicions proved to be ridiculous, and of telling him so. Of course it is excusable enough in him to

be astonished and alarmed and all that; but with us it is different.'

'But look here, you know,' said Aquitaine, 'it is a terribly serious business for us all, as well as for Fanshawe. It might not be any matter in itself whether this fellow was Edmund Varlowe or was not; but it is a tremendously serious thing if a man who has such influence, and is carrying on the great enterprise he talks of, and entangling the fortunes and whole future of thousands of men and women, should turn out to be an impostor in anything.'

'I don't know what you are all about,' Marion said uneasily; 'you are all down upon Montana. I never saw such a thing. I fully believe the man is as true as steel and as open as the sun. It is his very nobleness of character that gets him such enemies.'

'Come, now,' Aquitaine interposed good-humouredly, but with a certain firmness of tone, 'you ought not to say that to us, Marion. You ought not to say that we don't like the man because of his nobleness of character.'

'Oh, no, no,' Marion said emphatically, 'I don't mean that, Aquitaine. I mean that his nobleness of character makes him enemies, and they send out stories about him, and fill the air with calumnies, and some of these things always stick, you know, and they impress even sensible men like yourself. I wish you could look at Montana as I do. I wish you knew him as I do, and then you would——'

'But what do you know about him?' Trescoe asked in a tone very unlike that which he usually adopted towards his father-in-law. 'You know nothing about him; you hear fine talk, and you see that the women all round are taken with him.'

'I don't see anything of the kind,' Marion interposed; 'some of them are as unjust to him as you are.'

'I don't want to be unjust to anyone,' said Trescoe, 'but I have had enough of *him*, and I won't stand it much longer.'

'Won't stand what?' Marion asked, looking him fixedly in the face.

'Well, I don't know about that,' said Trescoe; 'or rather, I do know—I know what I mean, and I won't stand it much longer.'

He turned away and left them.

'Now, Marion,' said Aquitaine, 'don't you really see the change that is made even in that young fellow by your friendship with Montana?'

Captain Marion grew a little redder and hotter than was usual with him.

'I see that Trescoe's in a bad humour about him, and I don't say that he's quite wrong. As you seem to know something about this, Aquitaine, and as you come to the point, I must say I do wish my daughter Katherine did not express her admiration of Montana quite so openly. I don't wonder if Trescoe is annoyed, and I think he ought to have stopped it long ago; but then one must not blame the girl. He is very handsome, very fascinating, and kind to women in a grave, fatherly sort of way, and honourable and all that; and you know, Aquitaine, she is not the only one.'

'No,' said Aquitaine with a sigh, 'she is not. There are others as foolish as she; and I wish to God my little girl had never seen him: I wish to God we had all never seen him. His coming has only brought discomfort to us all, and it is well if it does not bring some unhappiness before we have done with it.'

Marion himself was not without some of the same uneasy feeling; but he was loyal to his friend, who, he honestly believed, was misjudged and misprized; and he would not give him up. He thought, however, it would be well to make some change in the arrangements he had laid out for the holiday—the holiday which was to have brought so much pleasure, and which already seemed withering away into mere discomfort. He thought, perhaps, it would be well that Trescoe and his wife should go to the Continent at once, and leave the rest of them to follow: that would be something. Aquitaine, of course, could easily take his daughter home whenever he would, and that would remove another embarrassment. There would only remain Sydney Marion and Geraldine, neither of whom appeared particularly sensitive to Montana's attractions. Thus, Marion thought, things would all go right again, and he would really get from Montana a clear, precise, business-like explanation—he laid great emphasis mentally on the word 'business-like'—of his project in all its details. Captain Marion actually felt business-like as he mentally repeated the word. It seemed to him to solve much of the difficulty. Yes, it must come to that, of course, in the end, even between the closest friends. Business-like it must be; business-like—he was resolved on that.

His daughter Katherine came upon him that moment. Aquitaine had left the room.

'Things seem pretty bad, papa,' she observed. 'I never saw

Frank in such moods as he is getting into lately. He talks of taking me away to the Continent at once.'

'Well, well,' said Marion, 'I think he is quite right. I wonder he did not do it before. You know I spoke to you, my dear, about this. I told you your goings-on about Montana would never do; people would be sure to misunderstand them.'

'I am sure I don't know what I have done,' Katherine expostulated. 'You all rave about him, or at least you did as long as you liked; and because I can't help thinking him a handsome man and a very agreeable man, everybody is down upon me. Frank is changed altogether; he goes on as if I had done something improper.'

'No, no, Katherine, don't talk in that flippant way; it is painful. Nobody supposes you have ever done or thought anything improper. But it does not look well when you women get vying with each other in admiration about any man; and I can't blame Frank for not liking that kind of thing—no husband would like it. Be a good girl, my dear, and a sensible girl, and drop it, in heaven's name; and Frank and you will get on as well as ever.'

'I don't think you ought to listen to silly stories and scandals,' said Katherine; 'I can tell you, papa, if you mind everything that everybody says, you would find that I am not the only member of the family people are talking about.'

'No?' said Marion. 'Sydney in the swim too? Well, I certainly should not have thought of that.' He was rather amused than otherwise at Katherine's attempt, as he understood it.

'Oh no, it is not Sydney,' his daughter coldly answered.

'Well, but there aren't any more of you. If it is not Sydney, I don't know who it is.'

'There is one more of us, papa,' said Katherine. 'We are three, are we not?'

'Oh, it concerns me, then,' said Marion; 'and pray, my dear, what do people say about me?'

'They say that you admire Geraldine Rowan a great deal, papa, and that Sydney and I are to have her soon as our stepmother. I am sure I don't wonder. I think she is a very good girl and a very charming girl, and I don't see what you could do better. But if people talk about us you need not wonder, for I can assure you they talk about you just as well.'

This was a startling piece of news to Captain Marion. For a while he was silent; more than silent: he was absolutely speechless. This had never occurred to him before. He had never

thought it possible that the idea would come into anybody's head. He had gone about with Geraldine just as freely as if she were his own daughter, and it always seemed to him that the mere fact of a man's having grown daughters ought to exempt him altogether from gossip of that kind. Was it possible that any people could talk in that way because he was seen occasionally with a young woman whose age was no greater than that of the youngest of his own girls?

'What stupid nonsense!' he exclaimed at last.

'Well, yes, of course, if you say it is nonsense,' Katherine said, with a malicious tone in her voice, 'and if you really mean that. I should believe everything you said, papa, and if you say you really don't intend anything of the kind, of course that is enough for me. But you mustn't wonder if outsiders are not so easily convinced; and then, you know, much more unlikely things have happened. We hear every day of girls marrying men who are years and years older than you, and not half so good-looking or attractive; and I must say that our Geraldine is a very attentive girl, and does cling on to you in a very friendly, fond kind of way—highly natural, to be sure, and a proper expression of gratitude on her part; only the world is apt to think that that sort of thing sooner or later ends in a wedding-ring, don't you know, papa. Anyhow, that is what people say, and I thought it only kindness to tell you.'

'Great kindness, indeed,' Marion said, 'very great kindness, and very pleasant to hear, too. How can people say such things, and how can other people listen to them? I believe it is always one's own family who listen most readily to any silly gossip about one.'

'Quite so,' said Katherine, with a sigh as significant as italics; 'exactly; that is just what I was saying before we struck on this subject of conversation. The members of my own family were the first, indeed I think the only persons, to listen to foolish gossip about me. So you see, papa, after all, we are in the same boat. It is very sad. They talk silly gossip about us all; but it is a comfort that our consciences are at rest, and we can bear it.'

Katherine disappeared, happy at having discharged her shaft, and believing that by doing so she had secured two great objects: satisfaction for her personal anger, and immunity from any further criticism with regard to her conduct.

The condition of things was not made pleasanter by Mr. Aquitaine's sudden announcement of his resolve to take Melissa

back to the North with him. She could return to London later, he said, when they were to start for the Continent; but in the meanwhile she must go home with him. Perhaps her mother wanted her; anyhow, she must go. Melissa was not in the least taken in by the suggestion that her mother might possibly want her. Her mother had never wanted her in her life, or, for that matter, wanted anybody else. To be allowed to lie on a sofa and do nothing was Mrs. Aquitaine's highest idea of enjoyment; and enjoyment with her was always a duty. Melissa knew well enough why she was taken home. She knew that her father was taking her away from Montana's presence, and that he must suspect quite enough to turn him into a watchful guardian of her, and to make her life with him an uneasy one for the present, and something very different from what it used to be. She had, however, no choice but to submit. She did not even think of resistance. Geraldine and Sydney hurried off with her to help her in making her preparations and packing her trunks. Geraldine and she hardly exchanged a word on the subject, except once when Sydney Marion had left them together, and the poor girl clasped Miss Rowan's hand, and said: 'Oh, Geraldine, thank you ever so much for having got me back my letter! Is not my father changed? Thank God, he does not know all! Oh, here's Sydney!'

That was all that passed between Geraldine and her, but it was enough to make Geraldine feel new pity for the foolish little girl, and new gladness that, at any risk to herself, she had got back Melissa's letter.

There was a strange embarrassment in Geraldine's manner to Captain Marion and in his to her. These two had taken so frank a liking to each other from the very beginning, that they might almost have seemed to any observer, or seemed to each other, like an affectionate father and daughter. There was something in the nature of the one specially sympathetic with that of the other. Geraldine was so much more intelligent than either of Marion's own daughters, that she had obtained a sort of leadership over his sweet sunny temper, and his sympathetic but not very vigorous nature. It was strange that when they were parting now, and he was going on a journey which he thought might be productive of some momentous consequences, they two should not be confidential, should be restrained in manner to each other. Geraldine was embarrassed because of the secrets she was keeping. She felt at moments strongly inclined to unburden her mind to Captain Marion, to tell him

all, at least so far as her part of the story was concerned, and trust to him to guide and guard her. This she felt at moments inclined to do, and then shrank back from the confession. Had she been left alone with Marion at this time, it would have probably come to a disclosure of all her feelings and her troubles. But she had not the opportunity, and the condition of her mind, divided between a wish to disclose all to him, and a shrinking back from any disclosure, put into her manner an embarrassment which was almost distressing to herself, and which Marion could not but see. Naturally, after the hints that Katherine had so kindly given him, he felt embarrassed in Geraldine's presence. He had never before for one moment thought of himself as playing in anybody's mind the part of a lover and future husband to the girl. He saw Geraldine's embarrassment and assumed that it came from the same source as his own. Therefore they parted, not coldly, but without the affectionate warmth that would have been frankly made manifest at another time. All this added new discomfort to Marion's unwilling journey North. Nor did he know how he and she were ever again to associate on the same frank, sweet, and friendly terms as those which had always prevailed until Montana's ill-omened coming and Katherine's ill-natured story.

The parting was melancholy. Everyone seemed to feel that the promised reunion of its members was a promise in which nobody believed. None of them expected to see that little group united again, or had any faith now in the long-looked-for continental trip. Katherine was perhaps the only one of the party who was a little glad at the breaking-up, and whose distress, at all events, was solely on her own account. For several reasons she was glad that Melissa was going away, and would have been rejoiced if Geraldine had been going too.

'I have written to Clement Hope,' said Captain Marion, turning back just as he was leaving. 'I have sent a messenger to him with a letter. I am uneasy about him and about his father. As I shan't be here when the answer comes, one of you girls can open it. Do whatever you think best, if there is anything to be done.'

At last the parting was made. There were some tears amongst the girls and some awkwardness amongst the men, and then the separation was accomplished, and Geraldine, Katherine, and Sydney were left alone—alone, that is to say, except for the guardianship of Mr. Trescoe, who seemed only too glad to escape their company and to smoke a sullen cigar all to himself.

CHAPTER XXI.

HURT TO THE DEATH.

THE house was very dreary to the three forlorn young women. It seemed as if they were to have a dull monotonous evening of it. Sydney was out of spirits; Katherine was out of temper; Geraldine was full of nameless bodings, expecting at every moment that something strange would happen. It was not long before the messenger came back with an answer from Clement Hope. Clement's letter was short and sad. It only said that his father had fallen suddenly ill a day or two ago, and was growing worse and worse; that he began to be alarmed about him; that Mr. Varlowe would not see any doctor, and if Captain Marion could spare half an hour it would be a relief to Clement to see him, for he was alone.

'What is to be done?' Sydney Marion asked, looking blankly at her companions.

'Oh, somebody must go to him at once,' said Geraldine. 'You *can't* leave the poor boy all alone in that dismal old house, with his father perhaps dying. Somebody must go to him at once.'

'All very well, Geraldine,' Sydney reasoned; 'but who is to go? Papa won't be back for days; Frank is out.'

'Frank wouldn't be of any use,' his wife declared.

'Somebody must go, all the same,' said Geraldine. 'I will go if nobody else does.'

'You'll go?' Sydney exclaimed, amazed out of all her ideas of propriety and the fitness of things; 'but, my dear Geraldine, you can't go.'

'Why not?' Geraldine asked.

'You don't mean to say you would go alone and see Mr. Hope?'

'No, I shan't go alone,' said Geraldine; 'because, Sydney, you will go with me.'

'Oh, no, dear,' said Sydney, 'I can't do that; I could not do it. That would not be proper at all. It would be ridiculous. What could we do to help Mr. Hope? We could do nothing.'

'But it is not a case of doing anything. It is a case of having somebody near him to say a friendly word. Will you come, Katherine?'

'I think you had better go, Katherine,' said Sydney, 'if somebody must go; if Geraldine will have it.'

'Indeed I will,' Geraldine said; 'I am going to put on my things this moment.'

'I can't believe that you are really going,' said Sydney, remonstrating.

'Well,' Geraldine replied composedly, 'if you will look out of the window, and will only accept the evidence of your senses, in five minutes you will see me get into a hansom cab, and if you can hear through the noise in the streets, you will hear me tell the cabman to go to Mr. Hope's house.'

'Then you had really better go with her, Katherine,' said Sydney. 'You are a married woman.'

Geraldine smiled. 'That will give an air of perfect propriety. Come, then, Katherine; I shall be delighted to take you with me. The protection of a married woman will be an unspeakable comfort and satisfaction to me.'

'I can't go,' Mrs. Trescoe said. 'Frank may come back at any moment. He might not like it.'

'Oh, to be sure,' said Geraldine; 'he might not like it; and of course you could not think of taking any step without first consulting him, and having his permission.'

This was sarcastic. Geraldine was growing annoyed.

'I should not like to go,' said Katherine. 'I don't think I ought to go. I don't see that it is any affair of mine. I can't assist the young man.'

Katherine expected Montana to come in that evening, and she was only too delighted at the chance of having him all to herself, or nearly all to herself.

'Then you won't go?' Geraldine asked her decisively.

'I *can't* go,' said Katherine. 'I can't go running all over the town after everybody who chooses to fall sick. If I fell sick myself, I should not expect Mr. Hope's father to come and see me.'

'All right,' said Geraldine; 'I am going, anyhow.'

'If you *will* go,' said Sydney, 'somebody must go with you, and I will go. I will do anything rather than leave you to go alone. Yes, I will go.' She spoke with the heroic resolve of a soldier who is determined to lead a forlorn hope, even though he himself has no faith in his mission. She compressed her lips. Her cheeks were pale as she spoke the resolve to do or die. If Geraldine must rush into the jaws of impropriety, it should not be said that she rushed there alone—that no friend stood by her to save her from the danger, or to share it and perish with her. Sydney Marion at that moment knew herself a heroine.

Geraldine laughed good-humouredly at the resolve.

'Well, come along, then, as quickly as possible. There is no time to be lost. We need not spend many moments in bedizening ourselves. We are not going to a dinner-party or a ball: come along, Sydney.' She swept poor Sydney out of the room, and presently Katherine, looking out of the window, saw the two girls get into a hansom cab and drive away.

Very dim and dismal looked the old house in the fading light of grey evening as the girls got out at the gate. There was an atmosphere of decay and of death all around it. The gravel crunched under their feet with a melancholy, disheartening sound that brought funereal omens. The knocker, although they used it as gently as possible, seemed to send ghostly cavernous echoes through the house. The old woman who opened the door seemed a little surprised at seeing the girls; and when they asked for Mr. Hope, the sensitive conscience of Sydney Marion made her believe there was a look of startled propriety on the aged lady's face. She brought them into a large, gaunt, heavily-furnished dining-room, and left them to wait there.

'I am afraid we ought not to have come,' said Sydney, in a low awe-stricken voice. 'I don't think it looks right, Geraldine. I don't think that old woman looks pleased to see us.'

'My dear,' said Geraldine, 'I did not come to see that old woman, and I don't care whether she looks pleased or displeased. If I can't be of any use, I am sure Mr. Hope would rather I did not stay. Then I can go away. There is no harm done, don't you see, in any case.'

'But,' Sydney pleaded, 'two girls coming alone in this way to see a young man—do you really—now, really—think it is quite right? I know you get extraordinary ideas—girls in America; but in England, you know—this is England——'

'This certainly is England; there I entirely agree with you.'

'Well, don't you think it strange?'

'I don't think it strange,' said Geraldine, 'that girls should like to be of some help to somebody—even in England; and if it is strange, the sooner we get over the strangeness the better. Anyhow, here we are, and we can't run away—at least, I don't mean to.'

The door opened, and Clement entered, looking very handsome for all his melancholy, and with a flush on his face caused by surprise and the excitement of seeing his unexpected visitors. He rushed up to them and clasped warmly a hand of each.

'Now, this is so good and kind of you! I wrote to Captain Marion, and I never expected that anybody else would come.'

'He would have come,' said Geraldine, 'but he had to leave town, and can't return perhaps for a day or two. We thought somebody ought to come, and so we came at once.'

This was heaping coals of fire upon the head of Sydney, this use of the word 'we;' thus taking her into the enterprise, and making her a full sharer in the evident credit it gave them in Clement Hope's eyes.

'Can we be of any use?' Sydney said, taking courage.

'Oh, yes,' Clement answered, with looks beaming with gratitude, 'you can. I am so lonely here. I don't know what to do. My father never was ill before. I never saw anyone ill.'

'May we go and see him?' Geraldine asked.

Sydney Marion felt that she could hardly stand erect while things were going on like this. In one moment they were being carried away to see a sick man in his very bedroom! True, he was an old man; but old or young—only think! Two girls thus taken off to see him, before they had time to collect their thoughts, and taken off under the escort of a young man!

Geraldine was both helpful and skilful. She had not been in the sick man's room a moment before she began altering its arrangements. She opened a window here, drew down a curtain there, quietly displaced chairs, felt the old man's hot hands and his damp forehead, sprinkled the room with aromatic vinegar, and seemed to find something to do in every corner. Sydney stood by helpless, looking sympathetic and feeling so, but not having the least idea of anything she could do to help anyone.

Geraldine meanwhile was putting questions all the time to Clement, in a low tone, about his father's condition—when he had begun to grow ill; when his mind had begun to wander.

'He would not have a doctor,' Clement said; 'he never would; the bare idea makes him angry.'

'Still, I think you must have a doctor now,' Geraldine said; 'and you must have a nurse at once—a really helpful one, not some dreadful old Mrs. Gamp. I will go myself—Sydney and I will go and find out something about a nurse. There is nothing we can do here just for the present, and we will come back again.'

In a moment they were out of the gate and on the main road, looking for a hansom cab.

'Do you know anything about nurses?' Sydney asked.

'Nothing at all; but we must get one.'

'Do you know where to go for one?'

'No, I don't think I do; but we can easily find out, can't we?'

'What an extraordinary girl you are!' Sydney said. 'You don't know London particularly well; you don't know anything about a nursing institution; you don't know where to go and find a nurse; and yet you say you will find one.'

'Of course,' said Geraldine composedly.

'But what will you do first?'

'Well, I think the best thing we can do is to go into a chemist's somewhere, and ask. Perhaps he will show us a directory, or tell us something about a nursing institution, and then we can go there. It is all quite easy. What on earth is your difficulty?'

They found a nurse; they found a doctor. The difficulties that Sydney dreaded began to disappear with marvellous rapidity. They went home and left a message for Mrs. Trescoe to say that they might possibly stay out all night. Sydney had by this time plunged so deeply into utter lawlessness and impropriety, that she had almost lost all consciousness of the conventionalities of maiden decorum, and would not have been surprised or shocked at any resolve Geraldine might announce. They went back to the sick man's house. The doctor did not think there was much to be done more than to have Mr. Varlowe carefully watched and nursed. He shook his head over the case; but took it with the practical composure of a physician, to whom all that sort of thing is commonplace, and who regards the death of a patient as an event of no greater moment than his starting off on a railway journey. He persisted in regarding Geraldine as Clement's sister, and complimented her on being more composed than her brother. She explained the real state of facts to him; but he did not pay any attention. He told her two or three stories of persons exactly like Mr. Varlowe in age, condition, and temperament, who, having previously enjoyed good health, were suddenly taken ill like him and died. But of course, he said, it did not necessarily follow that Mr. Varlowe was to die; only it was as well to be prepared. He said he would call in the morning, and see how things were looking. Geraldine was glad when he went away.

Geraldine was standing in a room on the ground floor, which served as a library or study for Clement in ordinary times. She was looking out upon the canal. It was the season of the year when there is hardly any night. The grey of twilight is succeeded imperceptibly by the grey of dawn; the one day hardly dead before the other begins to live. Her thoughts were going back to another house of death, in which, too, she had watched the dawn succeed the dusk, and tears came into her eyes. Clement entered the room, and she kept her face turned to the

window, that he might not see her tears. The sound of wheels was heard, and a brougham stopped at the door.

'Look, Miss Rowan,' Clement said; 'here is Mr. Montana. Is it not like him to come in this way? I might have known he would come; but I didn't think of it. I never sent for him.'

Geraldine made no answer. A nameless fear went through her. She thought there was something unnatural, something unholy, in Montana's appearance at the death-bed of the old man, whose death she felt sure was hastened by Montana's own words and acts. Whether Montana was true man or false, this was true all the same. Yet she could not help thinking that Montana must be right. It was surely impossible that he could voluntarily present himself at the death-bed of a father whom he had repudiated, and whose death, in all human probability, his cruelty and treachery had brought about. 'I must have wronged him,' she thought.

Montana came in, quiet, sweet, not surprised at anything; accepting Geraldine's presence there as if it were in the ordinary course of things.

'I called at Captain Marion's,' he explained, 'and Mrs. Trescoe kindly told me of what had happened. I thought perhaps I could be of some service, and I came on; I would have come long before this, only I did not know of it. Mrs. Trescoe only told me as I was leaving; she probably thought I knew. Mr. Trescoe offered to come with me, but it was not necessary. We are quite enough.'

'You are very, very kind,' Clement said, 'but you must not stay too long.'

'I shall stay for the present,' Montana answered; 'I shan't leave you alone here, Clement.'

'Miss Rowan was so kind as to come——'

'It was just what I should have expected of Miss Rowan,' Montana said; and Geraldine was really pleased.

Geraldine felt that she could almost have admired Montana at that time. She began now to understand how it was that in moments of excitement, or even of danger, brave men could look to him, as she knew they had done, could ask for his guidance, and could trust to it. The moment he entered the place, he took, as it were, the command of everything. A sense of relief and security, of something almost like happiness, settled upon the watchers in that melancholy house the moment he had come. It was as when the captain, suddenly aroused in the night of storm, takes charge of the vessel himself, or when a veteran

general is hastily summoned to the leadership of a distressed army. Montana knew something—knew a good deal, indeed—of medicine and surgery, and understood all that pertains to the hygiene of the sick chamber. He was quite easy and firm; had an eye for everything that needed to be done, and knew exactly what everyone of that little party best could do. To Geraldine he said once, dropping the words into her ear as he passed, 'There is really nothing to be done that can be of much service. We can only smooth the way for him. The time is not far distant.'

Geraldine gave a little start. She had expected so much, and yet it was a shock to hear it.

'Is it a question of days?' she asked.

'Of days at the most,' he said. 'Very likely a question of hours.'

Geraldine noticed that he spoke to Clement in a more reassuring way—not, indeed, holding out any hope, but still speaking with less suggestion of immediate danger.

'Clement, my dear boy,' he said in his kindliest tone, 'there is something I want you to do for me. It is not much use your being here just now, and it would do you good to move about a little. I have something at my lodgings which I think would be very soothing and refreshing for our poor old friend, and which I have often found to act with good effect in restoring consciousness to a wandering mind and failing nerves. It is a mixture that the Indians make out of various roots and barks of trees. You can easily find it. Go to my lodgings as quickly as you can—here is my latch-key—and in my bedroom, in the dressing-case—this is the key of it—you will find this one bottle. I have a little stock of it, but I only keep just one bottle there for use. Bring it back. No one could find it so well as you except myself, and I really think I am likely to be of more use here than you are. When you come back we can try it with our dear old friend, and I feel sure it will do him good.'

Geraldine was present when this was said. She looked surprised. It seemed strange that Mr. Montana should send Clement out of the way just then, but she assumed that it was done with the kindly purpose of distracting the young man's attention, and giving him something to do. He really was rather in the way than otherwise when he remained in the sick man's room, or near it. But she could not help thinking, 'Suppose Mr. Varlowe should die in the meantime?'

Clement went his way, however, without a word.

CHAPTER XXII.

FATHER AND SON.

GERALDINE felt unutterably miserable and lonely when Clement left the house. She stood at the window looking after him. Montana spoke a word or two to her which she did not answer—which perhaps she did not even hear. Then he went quietly away to resume his place in the sick man's room. It seemed to Geraldine something unspeakably strange that Clement should be sent out of the house at such a time. She had an ominous conviction that something would happen while he was away. The house appeared not merely to have become more gloomy than ever because of his absence; but there was a certain sense of terror—nameless, but very real—diffused all around. So, at least, it seemed to Geraldine's overstrung nerves.

She remained brooding over disheartening fancies until it suddenly occurred to her that she had not come to that house to occupy herself in idle broodings, but to give some active help. She was going quietly back to the sick-room, when she met the nurse, who told her that Mr. Varlowe was sleeping pleasantly, and that she, the nurse, was going to make some tea; which, she observed, she thought would do the young ladies some good; thereby delicately implying that it was merely on the young ladies' account she thought of making it. Geraldine declined the tea just then, wondering meanwhile at the cool, practical, professional way of taking things, which is so readily acquired by those who have to do with sickness and death as matters of business. She went upstairs to the sick-room. As she was near its door, Sydney came out for something, and, meeting Geraldine, told her that Mr. Montana was alone with the sick man; and with scared face Sydney added that she was afraid Mr. Varlowe would not live until Clement's return.

Geraldine hurried noiselessly into the room, feeling, in a vague kind of way, that somebody besides Montana ought to be present at the old man's last moments. She opened the door very quietly. The dawn was broadening through the windows. The lamp looked very pale. One of the blinds was drawn up, and she could see the trees and the waters of the canal in the growing light. The birds began to sing. She remembered always, afterwards, having heard them as she stood for one moment on the threshold.

Why she stood there and did not instantly go in, she did not know. She saw Montana kneeling by the bedside. She saw that

he had taken Mr. Varlowe's hand in his; she was confident, somehow, from the old man's attitude, though she could not see his face, that he had returned for a moment to consciousness, in that lighting up before death of which poets as well as nurses tell us; and if she was not dreaming, or if her senses were not racked by unusual tension beyond their sober trustworthiness, she heard Montana utter the word 'father.' Then she saw the poor father trying to rise in his bed, and extending his other hand over Montana's bowed head, as if in forgiveness and in blessing; and she heard him murmur the words: 'Edmund, Edmund, my son! come back at last!' and then a sort of shiver seemed to go through him which shook the bed under him, and he fell back. Mr. Varlowe was dead. But there was still upon his face a smile of sweet satisfaction and comfort and peace. If Geraldine was not the victim of a mere phantasy, Mr. Varlowe had died with a full conviction that his lost son had come back to him, and prayed for his forgiveness, and offered him love.

Geraldine surely did see and hear all this! She could not be mistaken. The light was streaming in, grey but clear, through the windows, and indeed the figure of Montana stood out in what seemed an almost unnatural distinctness. She was touched to the heart; she was disposed to forgive him all his past disloyalty to his father for this one act of penitence and submission. What true woman is not deeply moved by the penitence of a man? It was for this, then, that he had come—to make atonement and pray for pardon. For the first time since she had known him, Geraldine felt as if she could be in sympathy with Montana, could admire him, could believe in the possibility of his being true and great. She felt ashamed of having, even unconsciously, broken in upon the sacred privacy of that most tender, touching scene of recognition. Yet she was glad that she had seen it, glad to know that Montana did not see her or anybody, and was simply acting on the impulse of that heart which, after all, it was now evident he must have. But she now felt as if she ought to steal softly out of the room, and not allow Montana to suspect that anyone had been present at that pathetic and tender scene. She was already drawing back, about to close the door behind her, and to leave the reconciled father and son alone. Tears were springing to her eyes, and indeed, if she could at that time have spoken to Montana alone and exactly as she felt, there is no knowing what gushing words of impulsive sympathy she might not have poured forth. But in a moment, as some scene changes in a

theatre, as the evening clouds change, as the face of a pool gets broken and transfigured by the wind, the whole condition of things was altered. Montana was now aware of her presence, and all the attitude of penitence, the words of affection, the touch of reconciliation, were over. She now saw Montana standing composedly erect beside the bed, in the attitude befitting some kindly sympathising stranger who knows that another sympathising stranger is in the room with him and has seen the last moments of a dying friend. One instant of time, one hardly appreciable instant, had made that change.

'It is all over,' Montana said, with the composure which was his characteristic; unmoved, but not unsympathetic. 'He is released. It was a peaceful ending.'

'Oh, why was not Clement here?' Geraldine asked in awe-stricken whisper. 'Why did you send him away?'

'It was much better he should not be here,' Montana answered. 'He is spared a pain.'

'Spared a pain! He will never forgive himself. I should never forgive myself if I were he. He will never forgive you, if you sent him away purposely.'

'I did not send him away purposely; I had hopes that the poor old man might live a little longer; and if we could have got the mixture I sent for, I think it would have restored him to consciousness. But is it not better as it is?' They both spoke in the lowest whisper, afraid, it would seem, to disturb that sacred stillness. 'I have often seen that the soul struggling to be released from its prison of clay is kept back by the sight of some loved one's face. I have seen dying men suffer a moment of evident agony in this way. Believe me, it is much better as it is—much better that the poor old man should die with only you and me—strangers, kindly strangers—looking on.'

Then the nurse came in, and Sydney Marion and Geraldine left the room. Had she really fancied all that strange scene by the old man's deathbed? Was Montana speaking but the truth when he talked of Mr. Varlowe dying in the presence of two kindly strangers? Surely she had seen what she thought she saw; surely she had heard the words whose echo she found still ringing in her ears. She had heard Montana call Mr. Varlowe 'father,' and had heard the old man's parting cry of joy and gratitude. And yet there was Montana, sympathetic indeed, but cool and composed as ever, giving reasons why it was better that no really loved one should be present to distract the old man's dying thoughts.

She hurried from the chamber of death out into the garden looking on the canal. Summer though it was, the dawn came up chilly, as it mostly does in these climes, and a cool wind blew upon Geraldine as she looked at the sky and the water and the grass, and felt only like one who dreams.

In a moment or two she heard a step beside her, and Montana was there. 'Strange,' he said, 'that we should be so shocked at death. I am not so myself. I think that when we cease to have business in life, the best thing that could happen to us is to die. People talk of this thing or that being an object worth dying for. I don't think that is much praise to give to anything. Tell us that an object is worth living for: there you show its value.'

Geraldine was so bewildered by her doubts as to what she had seen or not seen, that the sense of mystery gave to Montana, in her eyes, an almost appalling interest. Was it conceivable of human nature that a man should thus arise from kneeling beside his father's deathbed, and coldly put his father's memory away from him, and repudiate and disclaim him, and seem in no wise troubled by doing all this, show none of the strain of conscious deceit? This was a psychological puzzle which Geraldine could not have explained, let her try her best. She had not, indeed, given much thought at any time to the phenomena of imposture. Like most other persons, she thought of imposture as always deliberate and self-conscious. She did not know how often the impostor succeeds in at least half deceiving himself, how often he succeeds in wholly deceiving himself with regard to questions on which there is a possibility of doubt. Nor had she ever considered how vast, how illimitable is the capacity of certain human beings for persuading themselves into a belief of the actual truth of anything which they desire to have true. Not understanding all this, or thinking of it, she began to question some of her convictions about Montana, despite what she had seen in Mr. Varlowe's room. She began to wonder whether it was not possible that Montana, after all, might not be the old man's son, that the words he had spoken might have meant only something of a symbolical kindness, the watcher by the bedside taking for a moment the part of son to the dying man by virtue of the common relationship of all human beings. We do not say that Geraldine admitted this conclusion, but the thought flickered across her mind, and flickered with a special vividness at this particular moment while she stood and looked at Montana. In any case, be the solution what it might, he was be-

coming more and more a bewildering study to her. She felt a growing fascination in his look, in the power he was beginning to exert over her, and in her own bewildering conjectures about him. She was growing into a frame of mind with regard to him which was puzzling and alarming to herself. 'I must escape soon and somehow from all this,' she thought. 'I could not endure this much longer.'

It may be that in her excited condition she spoke these words, or some of them, aloud. It may be only that Montana guessed at what thoughts were in her mind. He was fond of showing himself capable of reading the thoughts of people in this way; he sometimes made a profound impression on his votaries by answering aloud to their unspoken questions.

'You are right,' Montana said calmly; 'you must leave this place. This old world is used up; its associations soon grow oppressive to all free spirits. I must leave it soon too—I have work to do; and you must join me in it.'

Geraldine turned, and looked appealingly at him.

'What do you want of me, Mr. Montana? Why do you persecute me? I have often told you what I feel. I do not trust you—I am afraid of you; I was not at first—I am now.'

'I knew it, Geraldine; I am glad of it. You begin to see what reality there is in me; you will trust me some time. You may trust me; I should never change to you.'

'You would sacrifice anything,' she said vehemently, 'or anyone, to any purpose of your own.'

He smiled. 'To any great purpose or any great work I would sacrifice myself readily—or anybody else, perhaps. But so would you—I know it; I can see it in everything you do; I can see it in your eyes. That is one reason why I want you to be joined with me in my work, once for all. Come!' He took her hand in his; she tried to draw it away, but he held it with a quiet strength, and she did not make a humiliating show of resistance. 'Come, Geraldine, consent to join me; it will be work worthy of you. My love for you isn't like that of a romantic boy for a silly girl; it is something deep and strong and sacred.'

'You make me so unhappy!' she said piteously.

'I'll make you happy in the future,' he answered; 'and make you famous too.'

These words made her impatient, and gave her courage.

'Really, I can't imagine myself becoming great and famous,' she said, and she withdrew her hand from his, and he did not

insist on holding it. His eloquence moved her much less than his silent gaze. 'I can't fancy myself at the head of any wonderful movement, Mr. Montana, and I am not ambitious.'

'Every woman is ambitious for herself or some one else; and yours would be the noble ambition of benefiting millions. We should come back to the old world from time to time and compare its worn-out decaying life with that fresh new life of freedom and equality and progress which we had called into being under brighter skies. We should compare the climate of England, its fogs, its damps, its chills, its wretchedness, with our glorious suns and stars and soft warm air. Look how the morning rises here; the damp of death is on it.'

'The damp of death is on everything round us here just now,' Geraldine said, with a chilly shudder. 'Death is so near us; there, only just behind those closed shutters. Do you think this is the time, Mr. Montana, or the place, to talk of ambitions and schemes, and loves and marryings?'

'I do,' Montana answered; 'the right time—the right place. Death reminds us that we too must die; and we must see all the more reason for making use of the life we have.'

'Clement is here,' Geraldine suddenly said.

She saw the young man coming up the road; he looked pale and haggard in the ghastly dawn. She could have cried aloud with gladness and relief at his coming, even though she dreaded to meet him, now that he was too late. For the moment, it must be owned, she thought most of the escape that his coming allowed her to make.

'I'll not stay to speak to him,' she said; 'I dare not—I could not tell him that his father died, and he away—sent away.'

'I'll meet him,' Montana said composedly; 'I hope to be able to show him that all has been for the best. But you need not stay, Geraldine; you are tired; we can speak of all this again.'

'Never, never, if I can possibly help it,' she said; and she fled into the house. Miserable, lonely, phantom-haunted as it was, filled everywhere with the presence of death, it was a refuge and a shelter to her now.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GAMES OF CROSS-PURPOSES.

'Give me a call to-day at half-past four; I want to see you particularly; be sure to come; no puttings-off, mind.'

Such was the tenor of a little note Montana received from

Lady Vanessa about noon of the day which had opened for him by the death-bed of his father. He was in little mood for the whims of a great lady. He would have evaded Vanessa's peremptory invitation if he could. But there was a straightforward strength of purpose about Lady Vanessa which always impressed him, and he felt sure that if she sent for him it was really because she had something to say which it would be well for him to hear. Besides, he began to think that it probably had something to do with the meeting between Geraldine and himself in Berkeley Square. It might be important for him to hear what the sprightly lady had to say on that subject. So he was punctual in his visit. Exactly at the appointed hour he was in Vanessa's drawing-room. Montana always prided himself on his punctuality. He had but one hero in his boyish, romantic days, and that was the Count of Monte Cristo; and the Count of Monte Cristo had an impressive way of always turning up at the exact moment, even if he had to come from the other end of the world. Half-unconsciously Montana was often playing the part of his boyhood's hero even still.

'So, here you are!' was Lady Vanessa's gracious greeting. 'I knew you would come; I want to talk to you.'

Lady Vanessa had just as much cruelty in her disposition as is consistent with general good-nature; that is to say, she felt kindly towards most persons, towards nearly all whom she knew, and she would have been glad, if it were put to her, to do a good turn for any man or woman. Nor would she under any circumstances have carried a freak of cruelty to the extent of inflicting serious pain. But within these limits she occasionally liked to be a little cruel, even to those for whom she had some regard. It gave her a pleasant sense of power when she was annoying people. She liked to sport with them, and make them seem ridiculous. Now, she had taken somewhat of a liking for Geraldine—'the little American,' as she called her—but she was none the less glad of the opportunity given to her to hurt the little American's feelings slightly, and to sport with her.

'What is the address of your little American?' she asked Montana abruptly.

'Do you mean Miss Rowan? She is not little, and she is not American.'

'Oh, I call her little,' said Lady Vanessa, conscious of her own superb height. 'She is little to tall folks like you and me;

and I call her American because she has been a long time in America, and picked up the ways of the people there.'

'Another correction I would suggest,' Montana quietly said. 'You call her *my* little American, and she is not mine in any sense.'

'But she is going to be, ain't she? I suppose you don't confabulate with girls in the public squares at midnight—girls like that, I mean—unless there is an engagement between you. I don't see what better you could do, my good friend. She is a very pretty girl, and clever and good, I'm sure. But if I were you, I wouldn't have meetings by moonlight alone with the girl I was going to marry. It won't do her any good in people's eyes. Now, I mean to go and see her and give her a warning. She is as innocent as a goose of all our ways here, and it is only Christian charity to put her up to things. You know that I am nothing if not Christian and charitable.'

Montana was annoyed at the way in which Lady Vanessa spoke, but thought it hardly worth while to take it seriously, and make any objection; and he was not perhaps in his heart sorry that she should go to Geraldine and tell her of the risk she ran by meeting him at night in the square. So he gave Lady Vanessa Geraldine's address, and Lady Vanessa straightway drove off to Captain Marion's house and asked to see Miss Rowan.

Geraldine was not much in the humour for visitors of any kind that day; especially was she not in the mood to encounter fashionable ladies of Lady Vanessa's style. But she received the great lady, and tried to put on an air of composure and of friendly welcome.

'Look here,' Lady Vanessa began, coming to the heart of the question, 'I have come to give you a piece of advice. You are a good girl, I am sure, and very clever, but you ain't up to our ways. In England it would never do for a girl to go meeting a man at midnight in one of the squares, even though she is engaged to him, or going to be engaged to him.'

Geraldine was surprised and distressed by such a greeting. Her first feeling was one of resentment, and she gave expression to it.

'I am much obliged to you, Lady Vanessa, for thinking of me at all, and coming to give me this warning, but I really don't want it. I do understand English ways quite well, and I knew what I was doing, and what people would say if they came to know of it. I suppose people *will* come to know of it now, and

I can't help it. As far as I am concerned, they may say what they like. I meant no harm, and thought no harm.'

'Of course you didn't,' Lady Vanessa said; 'and there is no harm done, child, anyhow. Nobody saw you but myself, as far as I know, and I shan't spread the story any farther. I could not help chaffing Montana a bit about it, because he sets up for such a saint, don't you know. But I really did not come to chaff *you*—only to give you a friendly hint. Nobody supposes you thought any harm; I am sure I don't. But still, don't do it again, there's a good girl.'

'I shan't have occasion to do it again. But if there were occasion I should not shrink from doing it again.'

'Oh, well, don't let there be occasion,' Lady Vanessa said. 'There need not be occasion, I should hope, for I don't advise you to make it a long engagement.'

'There is no engagement,' Geraldine said, 'between Mr. Montana and me, long or short—there never will be.'

'Come, now! that won't do, you know. I have too high an opinion of you, Miss Rowan, to think that you are a girl to go spooning about with a man like Montana at night in a public square, unless you were going to marry him. I know he wants to marry you. He hasn't told me so in so many words, but he allowed me to understand it; and there are lots of girls, let me tell you, would be only too glad to be in your place. So don't talk about not being engaged to Mr. Montana—at least, to a sensible woman like me.'

'But I am not engaged to Mr. Montana,' said Geraldine firmly, 'and I never shall be. If you care about knowing anything of my affairs, Lady Vanessa, you may as well know that at once—I shall never marry Mr. Montana, or be engaged to him.'

'But he has asked you?'

'I don't think I ought to tell you anything about it,' said Geraldine, 'more than I have told you. I would not have told you that if I could have avoided it.'

'Oh, bless you, I know it all!' Lady Vanessa declared. 'I know that he is wild about you, and I know that he has asked you to marry him, but I certainly did not know that you had made up your mind the other way. I can only say, I don't understand you at all. I am sure you mean no harm, but let me tell you—a girl who refuses a man, and then goes about afterwards with him alone at night in a London square, will be apt to be considered an eccentric sort of young woman.'

'I don't mind,' said Geraldine. 'I can't help that.'

'But look here—now, don't be offended; I mean this in all kindness—will you let me advise you? You are awfully proud, of course, and you think me very rude and intrusive. Well, perhaps I am a little intrusive, but I only mean it for your good. I understand our London world, and you don't. Do, pray, like a good girl, if you don't mean to marry Mr. Montana, keep out of his way, and make him keep out of your way, and be resolute about it.'

Lady Vanessa now grew more and more interested in 'the little American,' and anxious about her.

Geraldine felt profoundly humiliated. She did not doubt the good intention of Lady Vanessa, whose frank smile indeed spoke only good nature, and she did not much mind Lady Vanessa's eccentric ways; but it was a bitter humiliation to her to know that even one woman thus regarded her with wonder, and felt bound to endeavour to intervene in her affairs. She did not know how far Lady Vanessa's promise of secrecy could be trusted, and anyhow it was a humbling thought that the promise of secrecy should be offered, and should be held necessary. She felt that the chain which had been so strangely drawing itself around Montana and her was in its mysterious way bringing them closer and closer. She could only strengthen her courage by saying to herself, 'I must get away. I must escape from all this, and go back to America.' She said as much aloud.

'I am going back to America very soon, Lady Vanessa; my mother is in America.'

'Then, the sooner you go back to your mother the better, my dear girl, if you really don't think of marrying Mr. Montana. But I should think that over, if I were you. He is a splendid fellow in many ways. You might do worse.'

Geraldine shook her head.

'No? Well, then, go back to America. Let me tell you, I don't think you'll find it such a very easy thing to get rid of Mr. Montana, if you stay here much longer. He's a man to have his way in most things. That's one reason why I like him. I like a man, or a woman either, who says, "Now, I want this or that, and I'm going to have it." That's the sort of man *he* is, don't you know. In many ways I think he's a good deal of a humbug—between ourselves, and since you say you don't intend to marry him. I've often said almost as much to himself. Well, good-bye, Miss Rowan; and I hope you'll forgive my intrusiveness. I'm awfully wilful; but I generally

mean well. On the whole, I think I'm glad you don't take to Montana; but all the same, I am not by any means sure that you are free of him. I should think he'll manage to have his way in the end.'

Lady Vanessa went away, leaving Geraldine much disturbed and distressed. What especially troubled her was the consciousness that in her secret soul she had misgivings now and then that corresponded with Lady Vanessa's doubts as to the possibility of her maintaining her will against Montana.

'Oh, why am I not madly in love with somebody?' the girl said, half seriously, half in that kind of miserable jesting mood in which men and women with a certain poetic dash in them are wont to laugh at their own weaknesses and perplexities. 'If I were only in love with some one, I should be safe. Why am I not in love with——' and then she stopped and got very red, and felt as if she had been going to say something shameful. What she was going to say was this: 'Why am I not in love with Clement Hope?'

'Poor boy!' she thought. 'Melissa is trouble enough for him.'

She was almost sorry that Lady Vanessa had gone. It was a relief to have anyone to speak to on the subject that engrossed her. To her unspeakable delight, a day or two after, Captain Marion returned suddenly to town. He came back, he said, to look after poor Clement Hope. In truth, that was only one reason for his sudden return. He did not care to take part in the inquiry his friends were making in the North. It was far too like the work of a private detective, he thought; and he said this as well as thought it. In vain Aquitaine and Fanshawe endeavoured to impress him with a sense of the imperative duty that they believed was imposed on them to settle the question of Montana's identity. Marion could only say that he detested such work; that he believed in his friend Montana, and scorned to make any inquiry about him. His mind was misgiving him, all the same. He would not admit it even to himself; but one source of his annoyance was this growing doubt which he would not acknowledge and could not wholly shake off.

His coming determined Geraldine. She would speak to him at once. She must have some friend and protector, and he was best of all. She was fond of him and trusted him; she knew he was fond of her and trusted her. There was no woman on this side of the Atlantic to whom she could possibly have opened her mind.

No sooner resolved than done. She invaded Captain Marion

in his study. She had never made quite so free as this before. Marion welcomed her, but seemed embarrassed too.

'I want to speak to you, Captain Marion,' Geraldine began, almost breathless. 'You have always been so good and kind to me, that I think I ought to tell you of something that troubles me.'

'There! I knew it,' Marion thought. 'The girl's been made miserable by these ridiculous reports! She thinks she ought not to stay here any longer.'

'Well, Geraldine,' he said, 'I have tried to be kind to you, but it was a selfish feeling, I am afraid;' and then he stopped, and thought to himself, 'Oh, hang it all! that will never do. That seems like making a declaration of love to the girl, and justifying all these fools say.—Selfish, you know,' he said, with an effort to be very resolute and calm, 'because it was so pleasant for my girls to have a companion like you.'

'I want to speak to you,' she said again, 'of something that troubles me.'

'Well, well, my dear!' Marion said. 'Geraldine—I mean, Miss Rowan——'

'Miss Rowan?' she asked, with open eyes of wonder. 'Why Miss Rowan? You are not offended with me?'

'Oh, good heavens, no!' and there was unmistakable earnestness in Marion's tone this time. 'How could I be offended with you, my dear girl—I mean Geraldine?'

'Then why did you call me "Miss Rowan"?'

'Well, if it comes to that,' said Marion, more embarrassed than ever, 'you are Miss Rowan, you know.'

'I am not generally Miss Rowan to you.'

'Well, I will call you anything you like,' he said, 'and I will do anything you like, for you know how fond I am of you. I mean—that is—of course, you know what I mean is—that you know what a high regard I have for you.'

'There is something strange in your manner,' Geraldine said, looking up at him with open wondering eyes. 'You don't seem like yourself. I almost think I ought not to come troubling you about this trouble of mine.'

'No, no; there is nothing wrong with me,' Marion said, 'and nothing wrong with you, I am sure.—What am I saying?' he mentally interjected. 'But I don't know, Geraldine, that there is much good in talking about this. It is all folly and nonsense. Let them say what they like. They can't compel you.'

'Can't compel me to do what?'

'Well, I am sorry to put it so bluntly,' said Marion. 'They cannot compel you to marry, if you don't like.'

'Oh, no,' said Geraldine, 'that is quite true. I tell myself that again and again, and yet I am so troubled, somehow. But how did you manage to guess beforehand what I was going to talk to you about? I did not think anyone here had thought of it but myself.'

'Yes; I have thought about it,' said Marion, 'because I have heard foolish talk about it.'

'Then it has been talked about?'

'Talked about! Oh, yes, my dear girl; everything is talked about now. It has been talked of to me, and I make no doubt it has been talked of to others. But I do assure you, Geraldine, in all sincerity and truth, I never said or thought anything which could give the slightest encouragement to talk like that.'

'No,' said Geraldine dreamily, 'I never supposed you did. Why should anyone suppose you did?'

'People suppose all sorts of things,' Marion said fretfully. 'People seem to think that a man can't be kind to a woman without trying to make her fall in love with him and marry him. They seem to forget that there is such a thing as difference of age.'

'Oh, well,' said Geraldine, 'I am afraid, Captain Marion, you lay too much stress upon that. I don't think you quite see all the difficulty that troubles me. The difference of age would not be much of an obstacle.'

'Not much of an obstacle!' Marion thought. 'Where are we now? What does the girl mean?' A sudden thought flashed across him. '*Is* there such a very great difference? She is a charming girl, and—oh, but that's nonsense!'

'Well,' he said aloud, 'difference of age means a difference that increases, and not diminishes, every day.'

'Then you are entirely on my side?'

'Entirely on your side? I am always on your side. But I don't think I quite understand. It is all in your own hands, Geraldine. No pressure whatever can be brought to bear upon you.'

'But that is what I am afraid of,' said Geraldine. 'There is a kind of strange mysterious pressure that I cannot understand or explain which is put on me, and I sometimes begin to be afraid that it will break down my will and all my power of resistance.'

Marion was now utterly puzzled. What did she mean? Was she ascribing to him some power of unconscious fascination which

he was not even trying to exert, but which threatened to prove too strong for her will?

'That's why I come to you,' she said; 'I want shelter, and strength and protection.'

'But, Geraldine, I really don't quite understand. Is not this only giving a countenance to what people say? Why come to me for shelter and protection—shelter and protection against what?'

'Against myself, sometimes, I am afraid—against my own want of firmness.'

'Surely you do not want firmness! Why, you seem to me to be a girl of the strongest character and the clearest purpose. You ought to know your own mind if any woman does. Do you know your own mind in this? Do you really know what you want to do and what you do not want to do?'

'I know what I wish to do,' Geraldine said plaintively; 'I know that well enough. I know what I hate and dread to do. I am afraid I cannot make anyone understand what my trouble is. I must seem a silly and stupid girl to you when I tell you in one breath that I am afraid of being brought to do the very thing I should most hate to do. I know that my life is entirely in my own keeping, and that no one can compel me—but still I come to you, and I must open my heart to you—I have no one else here—and tell you that I am weak and cowardly enough sometimes to fear that I may be persuaded to give way. So I want you to support me and defend me.'

Marion now began to find that they were really at cross-purposes, and that things were not as he was supposing them to be.

'I think, Geraldine,' he said, 'we had better have a little very plain speaking, and put what we mean into precise words. What do you want me to do? What is the danger you want me to protect you against?'

Geraldine stopped for a moment. She was disappointed. Either Marion really did not know her trouble, or he would not relieve her from the pain of explaining it in words. It had been a great relief to her for the moment, when she fancied that Marion could guess at what she wished to say without giving her the pain of saying it. This made things more easy, even although it brought with it the humiliating knowledge that she had been talked about. Now the momentary relief was gone, and she had to put her case plainly. She made up her mind, and came to the point at once.

'I want you,' she said, 'Captain Marion, as the dearest friend I have here, to stand between me and Mr. Montana.'

Captain Marion started to his feet. This was a surprise indeed. Of this he had never thought. How ridiculous now seemed the absurd conjecture that a moment before he had allowed into his mind!

'From Montana!' he said; 'from Montana, Geraldine? Do you really mean that? What has Montana been saying?'

'Can't you guess?'

'For heaven's sake, like a dear girl, let's have no more guessing. I have been guessing already, and guessing wrongly, as I dare say you may have seen, and very likely to make a fool of myself I was.'

Poor Geraldine had seen nothing of the kind, nor thought anything about it. She was too much engrossed in her own trouble.

'Well, it is this,' she said. 'I suppose I ought to be much flattered and very grateful. Mr. Montana professes a great liking for me. You know the kind of way he talks. He professes to think me a woman just suited for him, and for his career, and for his work, and all the rest of it, and has asked me—well, to marry him.'

Marion walked uneasily about the room. The news troubled him. A few days ago he would have been delighted to hear it; now he was distressed by it. Not that his faith in Montana was shaken as yet, but that he did not like the idea of even Montana offering himself as a husband to Geraldine while any manner of suspicion or doubt about him and his purposes remained on anyone's mind. And then—and then—she was a charming girl, and Marion was very fond of her, and people had talked as if it were possible that she might marry him; and although Marion did not want her to do so, yet for the moment there was in his heart a sort of revolt at the thought of her marrying anyone else.

'And you have answered "No"?' he said at last, stopping in his walk, but not looking at her.

'I have answered "No"; and I mean "No."'

'Very well; then I suppose there is an end of it, isn't there?' There was something strangely fretful in his tone.

At that moment a letter was put into Geraldine's hand. It was in Montana's handwriting. She looked up at Marion with such an expression in her face that she might as well have told him at once the letter was from Montana. He could not but know it. 'From Montana?' he said.

'It is. I don't know what he is writing to me about.'

'Hadn't you better open it and see?'

Geraldine read the letter aloud, not without some trepidation. It was very short. It only begged her to come to him at once. 'There is good reason,' Montana wrote. 'Even you, when you come, will see that I was right in sending for you.'

'What absurd mystery is this?' Marion asked. 'What is coming over everybody? We are all going in for mysteries and mysterious inquiries, all over the place. Not one of us is a bit like what he was or she was two months ago. You can't go to him, Geraldine.'

'Oh, no,' she said at once. 'I don't know what he can want of me. I can't go; it's out of the question.' Then suddenly remembering Melissa and her unlucky correspondence, she stopped in embarrassment, and with a growing colour on her cheek, she said, 'Yes, Captain Marion, I must go to him. I can't help it.'

'Another mystery!' he said. 'You say you won't marry Montana, and that you don't like him; and yet he has only to send for you, and you run to him! He has only to whistle, and you fly to him. Geraldine, you shan't go.'

'I must go, indeed,' she pleaded. 'It is something I am sure that does not concern me, but it does concern some one else. I must go, Captain Marion.'

'Let me go; I will talk to Montana. He is a man, and has some sense.'

'Come, you are turning cynical now,' Geraldine said, with an effort to be pleasant, 'and you must have your fling against women too. You say we are changed, Captain Marion. Is not this something of a change in you?'

'Well, I dare say it is. I suppose some wrong twist is getting into my mind as well as into the minds of all the rest of you. Anyhow, let me go and talk to him, Geraldine.'

'I can't, indeed. I must go. Pray be kind to me, and don't ask me anything. It is all right—at least, it is not all right, and it might be all wrong, but I don't want it to be so; and I want to go and see him, and I must go at once.'

'Then I will go with you.'

'Yes, come with me by all means,' Geraldine said, very glad of his presence and protection; 'come with me, and wait for me. I shall be obliged to speak to Mr. Montana alone, but you can come and wait for me, and you can cut the interview short when you think it has lasted long enough. I shall be very glad to have you with me. Only, come; we must not lose time.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

'SHE'S LEFT HER HOME, THE GRACELESS GIRL.'

An hour or so before this talk between Geraldine and Marion, a panting, alarmed little fugitive was getting out of a train at Euston Square. The train was crowded, and there was a great deal of bustle at the station. The fugitive was able to escape unnoticed. Had there been less crowd and less confusion, less struggling for luggage, and hustling of porters, and clamour of cabmen, somebody must have observed that the fugitive was a fugitive, and was in much alarm and distress.

Melissa Aquitaine, when she got out of the train, looked so wildly about her, and then drew herself together with such an elaborate and determined appearance of absolute composure and utter indifference, that anybody who had time to observe her must have seen her confusion. She put aside intrusive porters who would ask her about her luggage. She told one such officious inquirer that she had no luggage; she asked another what it mattered to him; to a third she gave no reply but an angry glance. She ran the wrong way up the platform, and found that she was apparently making for the place whence she had started. She then turned round affrighted and ran the other way, and passed the door of exit in her alarm, and got bewildered amongst the booking-offices, and telegraph-offices, and refreshment-rooms, and hideous men and odious barmaids. Then, when she was actually in the open street, it occurred to her that she had not the least idea how to get to the place she wished to reach. She turned back and hailed a hansom cab, then changed her mind and got into a heavy four-wheeler, paying no attention to the importunate demand of the driver of the hansom to be compensated for breach of contract. She told the driver of her four-wheeler to get on as quickly as he could, without telling him where he was to go. He saw clearly enough that something was wrong, and so drove her a little way from the station before he stopped to ask her any question. He came down from his box and put his head in at the window, convinced that it was a case for quiet and confidence. Her manner fully confirmed his idea, for she whispered the direction to him in as low a tone as though there had been anybody near to hear it or care about it. She named the street where Montana lived. She was going in this affrighted way to see Mr. Montana. She had come from her home for the purpose. She had, in plain words, run away.

During the last day or two she had heard talk of some vague kind between her father and Mr. Fanshawe about Montana. She knew that they thought they had found out, or were on the track of finding out, something to his disadvantage. She lay awake at night thinking of what she should do. She thought of writing to him, and began a letter and then stopped. She could not explain to him in a letter all her grounds for alarm.

Then, a letter might not reach him. She could not remember the number of the house in which he lived, although she could have found the house easily enough if she were there. Why, then, could she not go there? In this long, wakeful, miserable night, that thought came more and more into her mind, 'Why not go and tell him!' If she could see him in time, and put him on his guard—what a service that would be to offer him! Perhaps he would be grateful, perhaps he would understand what risks she had run, and how much she had sacrificed for him. Perhaps, out of being grateful to her, he might come to care for her. At all events, he could not but speak kindly to her and pity her. She rose from her bed half a dozen times at night, and walked up and down her great lavishly-ornamented Moorish-Turkish-Japanese room, in whose decorations she had once taken such pride and pleasure, and about which now she cared so little. She walked up and down, looking like a perturbed and restless little ghost. She looked out of the window at the growing dawn, and tried to keep her composure, and to think over things, and to make up her mind. When the full morning came at last, and the household was stirring, she listened for every word of conversation among the men that might give her some hint of the danger which threatened Montana. Frank Trescoe, she found, had suddenly come down from London—what did that mean? She did not hear much, but still there were words let drop now and then, and there was sullen resolve enough in Frank Trescoe's tones, to make her feel convinced that there was a danger, and that they were all set on doing some injury to Montana. It never occurred to her to think of anybody else being in the right, and Montana being in the wrong. Trescoe and Fanshawe she regarded as mere conspirators against a good and great man; vile, malignant, evil-minded conspirators, who, out of their sheer wickedness, were bent on injuring him because of his mere goodness. Her father she regarded as one meant for better things, but drawn into a base conspiracy through the delusive arts of unscrupulous acquaintances. The more she thought, the more she raged against

the conspirators, the more she became determined that it was her destiny and her duty to baffle the conspiracy and to save the noble victim.

A plan soon shaped itself in her mind. That day Mrs. Aquitaine had promised to take her to an art gallery in the town, to meet some girls, cousins of Melissa's, there. Melissa knew well what that would come to. Mrs. Aquitaine would be sure, when the moment came, to say she could not go. She would not quit her beloved sofa. Then Melissa would pout at the disappointment, and the easy mamma would allow her to go alone in the carriage. Once she was free of the house, anything might be done. She turned the whole matter over in her throbbing little brain, and she began to think that the stars in their courses were fighting on her side. She would be expected to pass many hours in the art gallery, looking at the pictures with her cousins, who passed for having ideas about art. It was now twelve o'clock. She would not be expected home before six o'clock at the earliest. Even if she were missed after that, half an hour or an hour, at least, would be allowed to pass before her absence would cause any alarm. She was observant enough of anything that interested her at the moment, and she had been quite enough interested in the going up to London and the coming back from it to bear in her mind the length of time the journey took, and the hour at which the train left from either end. She remembered that there was a train about one o'clock for London. If she went by that train she also knew that she would be in London actually before her absence could create any alarm at home. She would be in London, and she would have accomplished her purpose. She would be able to warn Montana even before a letter could do it. She would have won some claim to his regard. She would have shown him that she was really devoted to him. It was as wild a scheme as ever entered the mind of a foolish, lovelorn, impassioned girl. Perhaps, considering the difference of time and place and all conditions, it was as least as wild as that of Juliet herself. But Melissa was now as devoted as any Juliet. There was scarcely any risk she would not have run, any folly she would not have committed, now that the fit was on her.

All that was known of her that day at home was that she went with her maid in the carriage to the art gallery, where she was to meet her cousins. She dismissed the maid and the carriage, and gave directions that they were to call for her at half-past six in the evening. She entered the gallery, went once

rapidly round the first room, came down the stairs again, and passed out. The man at the door of the gallery noticed her sudden departure, and thought she had gone to call back the carriage, or give some message, or look for something she had forgotten. He paid no great attention to the matter; only, he did remember afterwards that he had seen the young lady come in and very soon after go out again.

Melissa was gone, and had her five or six hours' law all to herself. She got into a cab and drove to the station. She was still some half an hour too early when she had bought her ticket, her hands trembling all the time with nervous excitement so that she could hardly take up her change, the money rattling about in a piteous and confusing way. Then she left her ticket behind her, and had to be called after and reminded of it. When all this was done she sat in miserable anxiety in the waiting-room, dreading lest at any moment some chance acquaintance should come in, or that her father, put in some strange way on the scent of her departure, should suddenly present himself at the door. The time seemed as if it never would pass. A kindly porter took pity on her, thinking that she was some poor girl who had to leave her home, perhaps to go to a strange town as governess or something of the kind, and wondering very much why it was that no friend could be found to come with her and see her off. He took her, therefore, under his charge, at first much to her alarm. When the train was ready he found a carriage for her, and saw her safely into it. She pulled out her purse, and, to his surprise, gave him a whole handful of silver, some of the shillings in her agitation falling on the platform. In a few minutes the train was gone, and Melissa's flight was safely made.

It was nearly seven o'clock when Montana got rid of the last of the visitors at his evening reception. He was weary, and full of ominous, uncomfortable feeling. His nerves, always highly strung, seemed now like musical instruments that vibrated to some unseen extraneous influence. Suddenly he was told that a lady wished particularly to speak with him for a few moments. This was vexatious. He was not in a mood to care for the spiritual confidence of any perplexed soul, and he assumed it was on some such business the lady was coming. His own soul was perplexed enough to occupy all his attention. He said he could not see anyone; but a pressing message came back, saying that the lady must see him—begged him to see her. He gave way at last, wearily. To do him justice, he was

not ill-natured at heart, and seldom denied any petition, no matter what inconvenience it brought to himself. He rather submitted to the lady's coming in than gave her permission to come; and he was determined to make her visit as short as possible, and to prevail on her to tell her story in the fewest words.

It was growing dusk, the evenings falling in now early, as the summer was waning; and Montana, his mind quite abstracted from all around him, did not recognise at first the little figure that stood upon his threshold.

Panting, palpitating with excitement, with fear and hope and anxiety of all kinds, the girl said: 'Mr. Montana, don't you know me? I am Melissa Aquitaine.'

'Miss Aquitaine!' Montana said, greatly surprised, his mind suddenly coming back to the mysterious letters of which he had received so many. 'I am very glad to see you; I didn't know you were in town. Why are you alone? Where is your father?'

'My father is at home,' she said; 'and that is why I have come here. I have come to tell you something, Mr. Montana—to warn you about something. I don't know what it is, but they have found out something, or they think they have, that concerns you; and it is something bad, they say; and I believe there is danger in it, or they are going to do something—I don't know what—but I could hear enough to know that there was danger for you, or something unpleasant for you, and I thought I would come and tell you of it.'

'When did you leave home?'

'Only to-day. I came by the train; at one o'clock, I think. I came away as soon as ever I could. I would have come any length to save you.'

'But,' Montana said, 'my dear young lady, I don't know what danger could threaten me, or how any warning could avert it.'

His mind misgave him, nevertheless. He was in a mood to anticipate danger. But he was not now, and never was, in a mood to show this.

'No one has anything to say against me, Miss Aquitaine. If I have enemies, they are enemies on public grounds, and I have no reason to dread them. Most certainly your father is not one of them.'

'I don't know,' said Melissa. 'I almost think he is now. Not that he would do anything unfair, of course; but he has something on his mind. They think they have made some discovery about you.'

'Who are "they"?' said Montana. 'Your father—and who else?'

'My father, and young Fanshawe, and Frank Trescoe, and others too, I think. They have been rummaging out evidence amongst all sorts of people where we live, you know, and they think they have found out something.'

'Do they know of your coming up to town?' he asked.

'Oh no,' said Melissa; 'they would never have allowed me if they knew. But I was determined to risk everything in order to warn you. I didn't care about the risk. I ran away, Mr. Montana, and that's the truth of it. I ran away from my home, and I don't care. I am not ashamed, or, if I am ashamed, I am not sorry.'

'I don't know how to thank you,' Montana said; and, indeed, he was for the moment surprised and touched by the reckless generosity of the girl. 'I don't know why you should do so much for me; or how I can show my gratitude.'

'You don't owe me any gratitude,' Melissa answered in piteous voice, and with eyes fixed on the ground. 'I couldn't help it, Mr. Montana. I would die for you, if that would do any good. I should like to die for you, if you would only speak a kind word or two to me. Oh, I am so wretched sometimes—and now you know everything, and you despise me.' She put her hands over her eyes and burst into tears. She had now completely broken down; the tension of excitement was relaxed; the physical and mental reaction had set in.

Montana was really moved. What man, after all, could ever be absolutely indifferent to such evidence of a pretty girl's devotion and love? She looked very charming, with her little child-like head bent over her hands, and her breast trembling and palpitating like that of an affrighted pigeon. For a moment Montana was filled with a feeling of pure and tender regret that he could not love the girl—that he could not be young again for the sake of loving her. If he could only take her to his heart and hold her against all, against friends and family and father, and make her his own! 'Here stands my dove—stoop at her if you dare,' is a noble line from Ben Jonson which exactly expresses the feeling Montana would have been glad just then if he too could have put into words and action. He spoke to Melissa in soft, kindly, reassuring words; not words of love—in all her confusion, Melissa could notice that—but words a little warmer than mere friendly interest inspires.

'It will all come right, my dear young lady. I will send a

telegram to your father at once, and we will explain all to him. He is a just man, and he will know how to make allowance for your generous friendship.'

Melissa shuddered. 'I dare not see my father.'

'Leave the explanation to me; I will tell your father—he is full of sympathy; he will understand. All will come right, believe me—you will be perfectly happy in your home again.'

Melissa dashed the tears from her eyes.

'Happy in my home!' she exclaimed. 'Do you think I could ever go home again? Do you think I could go back to be the scandal of the place; to be talked of everywhere as the girl who ran away because she was—well, because she was madly in love with a man who didn't care three straws about her? To have young Fanshawe and everybody else despising me, and preaching sermons about me? No, Mr. Montana, I'll not go home. I knew what I was doing well enough, silly and foolish though I am. I did it for you, and I would do it over again; but I'll not go home. Things never can come right again for me, and I don't much care now.'

She seemed to have grown into a strange maturity of thought and speech within a few moments. She spoke with an almost icy composure. She had all the quiet indomitable courage of despair. She asked nothing now of fate.

Montana grew alarmed. There was no mistaking Melissa's earnestness of purpose. A woman who spoke like that was capable of any resolve. He tried to reason with her, but she put his reasoning quietly aside. Nothing on earth could move her, she said. She would never go back to her home.

'We can do so little for you here,' he said. 'I have not even a woman servant, Melissa.'

Melissa's eyes lit up for a moment as she heard him call her by her name—for the first time. He saw it, and stopped short. Then she smiled a wild smile.

'You don't know what to do with me? I am terribly in the way. But I don't mean to put you to any trouble, Mr. Montana; I am going at once.

'My dear Miss Aquitaine, going where?' This time it was 'Miss Aquitaine.'

'I don't know—anywhere out of this. I have done all I wanted to do, Mr. Montana—fulfilled my mission, I dare say some of you would call it.' There was a ring of her old petulance in her voice as she said these words. I think there is some plotting going on against you, and I have come to tell you of it,

to put you on your guard; and that's about the best mission I could have; and so, don't mind about me—I'm all right. Good-evening, Mr. Montana.' She got up and held out her hand.

'You can't go out of this,' Montana said, 'until I have put you in the care of some relatives or friends who have a higher claim on you than I have. For the present, you must stay here. I am old enough to be your father—almost; no one will say a word because you have spent a few hours in my house. I owe you too deep a debt of gratitude not to take good care of you—and we are not so ungracious here as to allow young ladies to go wandering about. Come! can you make tea?'

She shook her head.

'I don't think I can; I can't do anything. You put some tea into something, and then you get hot water: but I don't know; I don't think I could do it.'

'Come, then, I can do it; and I'll show you how. I have learned to do all sorts of cookery for myself in my odd life of wandering. I want some tea, and I know you do too. Now, then, you shall look on, and I'll give you a lesson in the art of making tea.'

Montana was talking with a purpose—with two purposes. He wanted to turn the girl's mind away from the seriousness of the situation; to try to get her to think of it as something unimportant, not at all irretrievable. Also, he wanted to gain time. Nothing could have been wiser on his part. Melissa's high-strung despairing mood became a little relaxed and softened as he spoke thus in quiet cheerful tone. He felt that he was gaining ground. He rang the bell; he bade his servant get tea-cups; kept the servant in and out of the room; talked all the time to Melissa, and drew her out, and compelled her to talk commonplaces in answer to his commonplaces; left the room three or four times and instantly came back again—thus relieving Melissa from any idea that he was keeping guard upon her—and in one of these short intervals he wrote to Geraldine Rowan and begged of her to come to him at once. He felt much satisfaction with what he had done. In all his concern for poor Melissa, he was glad to make of her a means to bring Geraldine Rowan to him. She must come, he thought, and her coming would be a new bond to connect her name with his. He passed some moments of keen excitement, for all his cool and cheerful manner. At last his servant came in and said:

'Miss Rowan, sir.'

'Show Miss Rowan in.' He rose with a feeling of triumph.

Melissa's eyes flashed fire. In an instant two things seemed to be made clear to her. She was captured, and Montana was Geraldine's accepted lover. She felt like a little panther caught in a trap. Was there ever, she thought, any girl so disappointed, so degraded before? Ah, it was too cruel of Montana, of Geraldine, of Heaven! All the heroic and romantic glow of her enterprise had quite gone out of it now. She was not a heroine; she was treated only like some naughty school-girl who has played the truant. She was merely kept in durance until some severe friend could be sent for to take her back to home and angry parents and punishment. Geraldine Rowan was to be brought to see her disgrace and take charge of her; and Geraldine would pity her and be kind to her, and would talk about her to Montana when she had gone, and would learn from him all that she had said in the wildness of her mad love; and the two would shake their heads over her; and Geraldine, for all her good nature, would condemn her as a very unwomanly and shocking girl. Even death would hardly save her now from being an object of ridicule. Yet, if there were any chance of death at that moment, oh, how gladly would our poor little outlaw have grasped at it! What a wild satisfaction it would have given her if she could have said to herself, 'When Geraldine comes, she will only see me dead.'

'You sent for Geraldine Rowan!' she exclaimed, turning upon him with eyes that flamed.

'I did,' he said. 'She is the best person to help us; she is very fond of you.'

'Oh!' was all Melissa's answer; a low cry of pain and shame.

CHAPTER XXV.

RECAPTURED, NOT RECOVERED.

THE room was dim and dusk, and Geraldine, with her short sight, had to look closely to see who was there.

She did not recognise Melissa at first. Montana came forward. 'Miss Aquitaine is here,' he said, 'and I am sure she would be glad to speak to you, Geraldine. That is why I sent for you so unceremoniously, and I knew you would come. I shall leave you two together for a few moments, and Miss Aquitaine will tell you why she came to town, and you will advise her.'

He had purposely called her Geraldine before Melissa, and had spoken with the manner of one who has authority. He felt certain that Geraldine in her surprise at that moment would not

stop to repudiate any authority he might seem to assume, and that it would be a distinct advantage to his purpose that Melissa should see his manner to Geraldine, and Geraldine's acceptance of it. When he went out of the room poor Melissa sat in a great arm-chair, leaning her chin upon her hand, and looking utterly haggard and crushed. She did not turn her eyes towards Geraldine, but kept them sullenly fixed on the floor.

At the first moment Geraldine was really not much surprised to see Melissa there. She had not had time to take in any of the meaning of the situation, and for a moment or two it did not seem to her more strange that Melissa should be in that house than if she had met her in Captain Marion's home. Now, however, looking at Melissa's crushed and desponding attitude, something like the truth came in upon her.

'When did you come to London?' she asked; 'and why did you come here?'

'You needn't ask me any questions,' Melissa said coldly; 'you needn't ask why I came here. Guess for yourself; and if you can't guess, Mr. Montana will tell you. I suppose you are very angry with me, Geraldine, but that was to be expected, and I don't care. I don't care who is angry with me now. *Cela m'est égal*, as some one says in some play.'

'Is your father in town?'

'He is not in town. If he were, I dare say I should not be here. You ought to feel grateful to me, Geraldine, although I'm sure you don't feel anything of the kind. I ran a risk to put Mr. Montana on his guard against people who are plotting and planning to injure him. That is more than you would have done, I dare say, although he is in love with you, and you are going to marry him.'

'Dear Melissa,' said Geraldine, 'don't talk in that way. It is painful to hear you. Mr. Montana is not in love with me.'

'Oh!' Melissa exclaimed, with a little start; 'how can you?'

'No, I don't believe it,' Geraldine answered, with some passion in her voice. 'I don't call that love—I don't call——. Well, at all events, I am not in love with him, and I am not going to marry him. I am never going to marry him. I am not going to marry anyone—him least of all in the world. I am so sorry for you, Melissa. I feel so deeply for you. I wish with all my heart that I could help you in any way, but this is really dreadful. You surely did not leave your home and your family, and your dear, kind, loving father, and rush up to London in this mad way?'

'Oh, but I did, though. That is exactly what I did do. I am not sorry for it, even still; although I know now, if I didn't know before, how little good it was for me to make any sacrifice. But I was not thinking about myself when I did it, and I am not thinking much about myself now. It is done, and can't be helped.'

Geraldine threw her arms round the trembling little girl, and kissed her tenderly again and again.

'You sweet, foolish, dreadful child!' she said; 'you were not thinking of yourself, I know. It was wild of you to do it, and you ought never to have done it. But it was generous, and I can't be very angry with you.'

Melissa struggled a little to get away. She was one of those who, however touched or tender at heart, are always inclined to rebel against any demonstration of tenderness or affection.

'Well, that's very good of you, Geraldine, I'm sure,' she said. 'I was afraid you would have been jealous, my dear, although you need not. There is not the slightest occasion for your being jealous about me, as you can see perfectly well.' She could not keep her tongue from petulance, even at that moment. 'But it is very kind of you, Geraldine, for all that, and what they call magnanimous; and I am sure you are sorry for me, more sorry than I am myself just at this moment. But it is all up with your silly friend, my dear, and I shall have to pass a life of penitence and scolding if I live at all, which I hope I shan't, and which I will not do if I can help it. Good-night, Geraldine; it is most improper of me to be here in a strange gentleman's apartments, isn't it? And it is not every strange gentleman's *fiancée* who would be quite so good-natured as you have been. Anyhow, it is time now for me to depart, as the heroines of the novels would say—or to take myself off, as I prefer to put it. Good-night.'

'Where on earth are you going?'

'I am going,' said Melissa, 'to the Salwanners—in America, where the war is. That is Dickens, Geraldine—one of the few things I remember in Dickens—and I like it, although I don't quite know what it means. I am going there—it has a charming vagueness about it, and falls in nicely with my present state of mind.'

'You are going home, I suppose?'

'I don't exactly know what "home" is,' said Melissa. 'I am quite sure I am not going home to my father's house, like the prodigal young person in the Bible story. I should have a very chilly reception there, I rather think.'

'Then, you are coming home with me; you are coming to Captain Marion's. That is your home in London.'

'I shan't do anything of the kind,' Melissa said, getting up and rapidly tying her bonnet and adjusting her mantle. 'Good-evening, Geraldine.'

'You are certainly not going out of this alone,' said Geraldine. 'My dear little Melissa, if I had to hold you by main force, I would take care of that. I fancy I am a good deal stronger than you. I almost think I could carry you from this to Captain Marion's in my arms, and I will do it too, rather than allow you to go anywhere by yourself to-night. But it doesn't need all that. Captain Marion is here. I brought him with me, and he will take care of you. He is as kind as any father could be, although I am sure your father is kind enough. Mr. Aquitaine will come up to-morrow, and everything will be right.'

'Ridiculous!' Melissa replied sharply; 'nothing on earth will ever be right with me again. I had much better be dead. Everybody will be ashamed of me, and scold me, and preach at me; and I shall be a byword and a reproach.'

Montana was not glad when, after leaving the two girls together, he was told that Captain Marion was in the house, had come with Miss Rowan, and wished to see him. Montana could hardly ever be described as disconcerted, but he was a little displeased at the news. He was not anxious to see Marion just then. He was not pleased to hear that Marion had come with Geraldine. Much of the dramatic effect of Geraldine's prompt answer to his summons would be taken away by her having come under the escort of Captain Marion. Then, again, he did not know whether Marion's return to town so suddenly might not have something ominous in it. All the time while he was reasoning with Melissa, and humouring her, and keeping up an appearance of the utmost calmness, his mind was far from being composed. No shadow on his face allowed the girl to suppose for a moment that there was anything to alarm him in the news she brought from the North. But he felt all the time that there probably was something in it. Of late he had begun to be conscious more or less vaguely that Trescoe disliked him. We have said already that Montana was not habitually an observant man, for the reason that he did not take sufficient interest in people in general to be observant of what they did or how they looked. But when anything aroused his interest, or his admiration, or his suspicion, then he could be keenly and closely observant, and he could look quite through the deeds of men or of women, unless they

were men and women with souls uncommonly deep and well guarded. He saw that Trescoe disliked him, and that there was something inexorable in Trescoe's dislike; and he credited the young man with much greater strength of will and purpose than those around him, even his wife and his father-in-law, were disposed to believe in. Naturally he was a little uneasy about young Fanshawe's share in the inquiries, whatever they were, now going on in the North. An exposure, or even a public inquiry of any kind, might be fatal to him just now. He knew that Geraldine suspected him, but that he did not heed. On the contrary, he thought he could give Geraldine some reasons for all that he had done which would satisfy her at least of his strength of purpose, and show her that he had a meaning in everything he said or did, and thus increase the influence which he already began to see that he was gaining over her mind. He had determined on making Geraldine his confidante. He knew well, from his experience of women, that a man can have no stronger hold over a woman than to confide to her some strange secret which deeply concerns him, and which no mortal knows but he and she alone. He had resolved to tell Geraldine something that very night which would have startled her; and now that Captain Marion had come there was no chance of a conversation of five minutes alone with her.

He went to meet Marion with his usual composure, although uncertain whether he was about to meet friend or enemy. He smiled his usual sweet and serene smile. It had done duty with Marion before, and did not fail even now. There was something strangely fascinating to the few who were privileged to see it when that cold, beautiful, marble-like face was suddenly brightened with a smile of peculiar sweetness which seemed to have a special welcome in it.

Marion, on his part, was a little embarrassed, and awkward, and cold. He felt as if his friend had a right to reproach him because he had listened to any inquiries or suspicions about him, and he was not certain whether Montana might not have heard something of this, and might not show it in his manner. Then, he was perplexed by Montana's peremptory summons to Geraldine. Remembering Geraldine's appeal to him, he felt as if he ought to act from the beginning in the character of a protector to her against advances which she declared to be unwelcome.

So the friends met on altered terms. But Montana's smile had its usual effect upon Marion, and they shook hands as though nothing had happened to keep them apart. Montana

came to the point at once. He never talked commonplaces. He never spoke of the fine weather, or greeted a newly-arriving friend with the indisputable truism, 'So you've got back!'

'I have heard,' he said, 'something of what has been going on among your friends in the North. So they think they have found out something about me, do they? Well, I am neither disturbed nor offended. If they make inquiry keen enough, they may find out a good many things about me that the world has not known. But without any boasting, Marion, I think they will find out nothing to do me any great discredit.'

'That I believe to the full,' Marion said earnestly. 'I am almost ashamed to have been there at all, and listened to any of their talk; but I came away, Montana, that is the truth, because I could not stand any more of it.'

'Well, don't let us talk of that,' Montana said. 'It is really of no consequence. It was not for that I sent for Miss Rowan. I did not know you were in town, Marion. I heard of all this in a strange sort of way. An unexpected messenger came and told me. It is a strange story, but many things in my life have been strange. If some suspect me and are untrue to me—some from whom I might have looked for better things—some are devoted to me to whose devotion I had no manner of claim. There is a sweet, generous, fond, foolish young woman in that room yonder whom I wished to give into Geraldine's charge. I give her now into yours.'

'Good God!' Marion exclaimed, as for a moment a thought terrible to him passed through his mind. 'Who is it?'

Pained as he was to hear of Melissa, and of her foolish flight, yet it was an unspeakable relief to him to hear only of Melissa.

'I need not ask you, I suppose, why the poor girl did this?'

'No,' Montana said, 'you need not. You can guess. But believe one thing, Marion—I had nothing to do with it. I hardly ever spoke a dozen words at a time to the young lady. But some young women of that age must always be romantic.'

'Yes, I suppose so. If it is not the curate or the music-master, it must be the first good-looking stranger that turns up. We must take her home to her father.'

'Do what you think best,' Montana said. 'I need not ask you to be kind to her. What she did was done out of mere generosity. I know Geraldine will be kind to her. I shan't see her again. I shall go out and not return till late at night, when I can feel certain that you and she are gone. I have something to say to you some other time about Miss Rowan; but that will keep. Good-night.'

Marion clasped his hand with increasing warmth of friendship. In his eyes, now, Montana was invested more than ever with heroic and noble attributes. He now understood why Montana had sent for Geraldine, and why he had sent for her in that peremptory and mysterious manner. He appreciated all the delicacy of his conduct and his words with regard to poor Melissa, and he felt satisfied that no plottings, plannings, or investigations could find out anything about Montana that was not to Montana's honour.

Presently Geraldine sent for him, and he went to her, and found Melissa in an unabashed and defiant mood. She declared that, do what he would, she would never go home. Geraldine and Marion did their best to soothe her, and to promise her that everything should be done to save her from any distress. Mr. Aquitaine was to be telegraphed to at once, in order to relieve him from alarm. Everything was to be made as smooth as possible—Marion would take care of that. Everything should be put in the gentlest way—Geraldine and Marion would take the responsibility of all that had been done. It is to be feared that Captain Marion sometimes went a little beyond the strict limits of the possible or the credible in his assurances that there were numberless ways of making the whole affair seem the simplest and most natural thing in the world to Mr. Aquitaine. Marion's heart misgave him even while he was most earnestly endeavouring to reassure the obstinate little fugitive.

Melissa herself gave unhesitating expression to her utter scepticism.

'Suppose,' she said scornfully, 'that we tell my father I got into the train by mistake, thinking it was a picture-gallery? He would be sure to believe that. Or why not say that I was walking in my sleep? Nothing is more common than for a girl to walk in her sleep; I have seen all sorts of odd stories in newspapers about such things. Or can't we say that Geraldine telegraphed for me to fly at once to her side, because she wanted my advice about a wedding-dress? There are lots of explanations.'

'We don't mean to tell lies, Melissa,' Captain Marion said, a little angrily.

'Oh, don't we? I thought we did. If we don't, I am afraid we can't make much of it.'

She was truly an unmanageable little object of sympathy. At last, however, she consented to go to Captain Marion's house.

'Let's have it all out at once,' she said; 'let Sydney preach at me, to begin with.'

'Sydney shan't say a word to you,' Marion declared sharply.

'And Katherine, too, will be glad to see me. We were in the same boat, I rather think, only she had the good luck not to fall out, and have to be rescued and pulled ashore, and made an object of pity.'

'For shame, Melissa, to talk in such a way!' Geraldine remonstrated, with something like anger in her voice. Marion was silent. With all his kindliness of nature and his pity for Melissa, he did at that moment think her a very wicked little girl.

But it made no difference in his treatment of her, in his patient, gentle way with her. Geraldine felt her heart swell with gratefulness and affection for him.

As they drove away from the fated house, Melissa gave one wild sad look back. Then she shrank into a corner of the carriage and was silent for a few moments. No one spoke. Suddenly she looked up.

'Mind, I am not going home,' she said energetically. 'I go with you now, Captain Marion and Geraldine; but I'll not go back to my father's house; no, never, never, never! I don't care what is said or what is done; I'll not go home again.'

The next morning Mr. Varlowe was buried. He was laid in a graveyard two or three miles out of London, clear of the streets and the crush of traffic, and the brick and mortar, and the fogs. The funeral was very quiet. Clement particularly desired that but few persons should be present. Montana was there, and Captain Marion, and one or two others, and that was all.

Clement did not exchange a word with Montana. They merely shook hands, and Montana's grasp expressed as much sympathy and kindliness and encouragement as a mere clasp of the hand could well be made to express. But he said nothing, and Clement seemed to avoid looking directly at him. To Captain Marion Clement said a few words, telling him frankly that he wished to be alone for a day or two, and to remain behind in the churchyard when the rest had gone. They appreciated his humour, and went away as soon as the grim ceremonial was over, and Clement was left alone. He stayed for some time in the cemetery, and looked sadly enough over the fair landscape spread out before him, the soft sloping hills and pleasant fields and gentle waters steeped in the sunlight of late summer. It was his humour to be alone there, and to walk home alone. The few miles of walk, he thought, would give him strength, and bring refreshment to his soul. He wanted to be alone, and to look the past and future steadily in the face,

and prepare to meet life on his own strength. An absolute change, such as years might not have made, had taken place in him within the last few days. Before Mr. Varlowe grew ill he was still but a boy, with a boy's vague sentiments and whims and ways, and now he had turned completely into a man. He felt as he walked home that the time had come for emerging straightway out of the cloud of half-poetic illusion and dream and sensuous intellectual reverie, and that he must make for himself a strong and a useful career. Of his passion for Melissa Aquitaine there was nothing left now. The rude wind of misfortune which had blown across him had swept that emotion away, as a gust of wind may sweep a faded flower from a window. It was too unreal and sickly a passion to bear the keen atmosphere of genuine pain. He was conscious that the feeling was gone, and he was glad of it. He looked back on that stage of his existence with a sort of shamefaced pity. It seemed strange to him now that anyone could think seriously of Melissa Aquitaine, or fail to see her weaknesses, and her faults, and her incapacity for understanding anything serious or great.

He reached his lonely house. He opened the door with his latch-key and let himself in. He stood for a moment at a window that looked out upon the garden, and thought of the evening, which now seemed so long ago and yet was so very recent, when he stood at the same window with Geraldine Rowan. In all his suffering and sorrow, as he re-entered that house, spectral with the memory of the dead, he could not help recalling that evening, and thinking of the new and strange sensations which had come up within him when he saw her there, and looked into her kindly sympathetic eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IMPULSE ON BOTH SIDES.

One effect produced upon Clement by late events was an unaccountable chill in his feelings towards Montana. It was not anything so definite as actual distrust. He had not thought the matter out in any way, or asked himself anything as to the nature of the change in his feelings. But the change was there, present always, and filling him with a certain pain. He was unwilling to see Montana. He shrank from speaking to him. He would, if possible, have avoided thinking of him. Perhaps this may have come merely from the unlucky accident by which he had been prevented from being with Mr. Varlowe to the last, and

of which Montana was the innocent cause. But, whatever its source, the feeling in Clement's mind was there. He no longer thought with eagerness of Montana's great scheme. He shrank from the idea of taking part in it, or of allying his fortunes in any way with Montana's leadership. Sometimes he felt that this was ungrateful and unworthy on his part, and he tried to put away the thought or to stifle it, but it would come back again.

In the old days, when men believed in ghosts, it sometimes happened that one was dimly, darkly conscious of the presence of some spectral visitant in the room with him. He saw nothing, he heard nothing out of the common, but the air was chill with the mysterious unseen presence; and as darkness looks with its hundred eyes, so this invisible companionship made its presence palpable by its myriad touches. Somewhat in the same way a phantom had arisen between Clement Hope and Montana. Unseen, its presence was felt. Voiceless, it bade Clement stand apart from Montana.

Clement was very busy for some few days. He threw an unresting energy now into all he had to do: it relieved him from grief, and, indeed, energy belonged to his nature, long as it had been suppressed. There were many matters of business to arrange in consequence of Mr. Varlowe's death. There were two wills made by Mr. Varlowe, one of several years' standing, with the contents of which Clement was familiar. It left everything to him, in the event of the missing son not reappearing; if the son should reappear, it divided the property equally between Clement and him. The second will, made shortly before Varlowe's death, left the whole to Clement unconditionally. The property, in houses and in money, was very considerable. Clement would be a comparatively rich man, should the son not reappear; even should the son come back and the division take place, he would still have more money than he wanted or cared for. He was resolved that he would not lead an idle life any more. The one thing that had tried and troubled him during the life of his benefactor was the way in which he had to live—striving for nothing, accomplishing nothing. Until lately he had hoped to devote himself to Montana's scheme, and Montana's service; now he no longer felt any inclination that way. But Montana had shown him a path to tread. Why should he not found a new colony for himself, on smaller proportions indeed, and a much more modest principle than Montana's vast enterprise, but a new colony, where striving, high-hearted men and women, now borne down by the cruel conditions

of life in great cities, should breathe free fresh air, and earn a happy living by energy and combination? The idea grew more and more fascinating as Clement turned it over day and night. That way, he felt, his inclinations, his capacity, and his ambition lay. There was nothing else left in our modern civilisation for one who had a real longing to do great work which should satisfy his own energy and serve his fellows. The scheme had an alluring savour of romance and of heroism about it. It was nobler than mere exploring. It was far more poetic than the writing of poor verses. It was more generous in its scope than any effort of beneficence here at home could be; its results, if it succeeded, would be more abiding than any work of art Clement was ever likely to give to the world. It would enable him to repay to many men and women all the unspeakable kindness his benefactor had lavished so long upon him. 'The money isn't mine in any sense,' Clement kept saying to himself; 'if I took it for myself, it would be only accepting alms in another form. I'll earn it by making it of use to others; and I'll make the giver's name live for ever in the grateful memory of men and women.' For he was resolved that the little Eden he proposed to found should perpetuate Mr. Varlowe's name. In the United States, as Clement knew, there were thriving settlements called after all manner of private individuals utterly unknown to the world before. Why should not his new colony be called 'Varlowe'?

'They shall remember me here and say I have done well,' he thought again and again, with pride and melancholy pleasure.

Who were to remember him? The Marions? Well, he should like them to remember him with kindness; but it was not the thought of their kind remembrance that made his eyes light and his voice tremble. Melissa? Alas, no! He only felt ashamed of himself now when he recalled his foolish, unreal fancy for poor Melissa. He knew only too well that that was not love at all. He knew it now by positive experience. Now, indeed, he felt what genuine love was; and mingling with every thought, selfish or unselfish, which rose up in his mind as he planned his new Utopia, was the belief that Geraldine would approve of what he was doing. He longed for the mere pride and delight of telling her what he meant to do, even while it was only yet a thought or a dream. At least, she would believe it a generous thought; her soft kindly eyes would smile approval of his dream, and encourage him to make it a reality. Was there a faint distant hope that she might one day come to think

well of him—so well that she might even care for him? Even in his own heart he hardly put it so boldly yet as to think of her loving him.

At least, he would go and see her. No one else should know of his plan and his dreams until they had been made known to her. Full of these thoughts, lifted by them out of himself, he went to see Geraldine. He had not heard anything of what had been happening in Captain Marion's house since he last was there; he knew nothing of the inquiries that were going on in the North, or of poor Melissa's flight.

Meanwhile, Melissa's escapade was not taken in London exactly as people took it in the town from which she came. In London, hardly anybody knew anything about it, and of the small minority who knew anything, a still smaller minority took the slightest interest in the matter. But in Melissa's own town it was, as she had predicted, a public talk and scandal. It proved utterly impossible to keep it from the knowledge of everybody. Not more than an hour or two had she been missing when Marion's reassuring telegram came to Mr. Aquitaine, and yet, in that time, inquiry enough had been made and alarm enough manifested to set the town in a sort of commotion. Soon there came the testimony of the man in the art gallery and the testimony of the porter at the station, and then it turned out that a great number of persons had seen Melissa and recognised her, and wondered where she was going, although, oddly enough, they had never said anything about it till the supposed scandal of the story came out. At last, there were so many rivals for the honour of having seen, and noticed, and suspected, and guessed all about her and her flight, that it would almost seem as if every man, woman, and child in the whole place had followed, watched, and studiously recorded every movement of the daughter of the great house of Aquitaine on that day, and was well aware of what she was doing, where she was going, and why she was leaving her home.

Mrs. Aquitaine took the matter calmy and sweetly. It did not strike her as anything very remarkable. It was silly of the girl to have gone making an afternoon call on a strange gentleman, she thought, and especially foolish to go flurrying up to London on a hot day in that kind of way; but, beyond that, Mrs. Aquitaine was not impressed. She would have received Melissa composedly, and been as sweet and kind and languidly contented as ever. Mr. Aquitaine took the affair differently. Out of his very affection for the girl and his tenderness to her, and his

sudden disappointment and anger, there grew for the time a strange harshness in him. He wrote to Captain Marion a quiet, cold letter, in which he absolutely declined to go for his daughter, or to see her, or to have anything to do with her for the present. 'She has made herself the heroine of a scandal,' he wrote, 'and until that scandal is forgotten, if it ever is, I don't want to see her here. You are so kind that I can ask you to take charge of her for the present; and in London nobody knows anything or cares anything about the name of Aquitaine. I will take her abroad after a while, when I have thought over what is best to do, but for the present I shall not see her.'

This was a relief to Melissa. She had dreaded a scene—her father coming up and upbraiding her, and trying to take her home again. She was now quietly miserable. She avoided as much as possible seeing anyone. She did not often come down to dinner with the rest of the family. When she did she was silent, or spoke aggressively by fits and starts.

Geraldine was very attentive to her, and tried as much as possible not to leave her alone. Captain Marion, of course, was always kind, but there was something in his manner that showed Melissa how completely he had changed his opinion with regard to her. Indeed, Marion was doing his best to avoid feeling a certain dislike for the poor girl, and he could not accomplish his wish.

'I am greatly afraid about Melissa,' Geraldine said to him.

'Why afraid, Geraldine? What can happen to her now?'

'I don't know; but there is something alarming to me in her ways, in her silence, and her looks. I am afraid she will try to get away from us, or to do something.'

These vague words 'to do something,' generally mean what the speaker dreads to say more plainly, but has distinctly in mind. If Geraldine could have allowed her thoughts a full expression, she would have said that she was afraid Melissa might at some moment be tempted to kill herself.

Marion was not alarmed. 'Oh, it is nothing,' he said; 'she is a silly, petulant girl. She will soon come right. I wonder at Aquitaine. It is ridiculous of him to go on in that obstinate way. He had much better come up and take Melissa home and be kind to her. But he will soon give in, you'll find. He is a very kindly-hearted fellow, only obstinate—all those northern men are obstinate. He will soon come up, and be very glad to have the whole thing forgotten. All will come right. Don't be alarmed, Geraldine. Pray don't, like a dear girl, conjure up any

unnecessary phantoms to worry and distress us. We have had enough of that sort of thing lately.'

These were dreary days for Geraldine. How many were they? Not many, surely—three or four at the most of this blank and melancholy seclusion; but they seemed very long. Montana did not come near them all the time; that was a relief. He would not come, Geraldine supposed, while Melissa was there. Marion went and saw him sometimes; but Geraldine for these few days was relieved from his presence, and that was something of a set-off against the discomfort of the life she was leading. She watched over Melissa with an anxious care, as if the girl were her sister; and she received little but petulance in return. So much gloom had come over the household, that even Sydney Marion, usually very patient, began to complain openly of it, and wondered why nobody could do anything to brighten their life for them.

Katherine spoke bitterly of Melissa. She had an especial spite against her just now, because her being immured in the house kept Montana from visiting them. Trescoe was still in the North. He had gone there when Captain Marion returned, and Katherine had been delighting herself with the hope that Montana would come very often, and that she could admire him without the check of Frank's angry looks. Melissa had not only committed the unpardonable impropriety of falling in love with Montana, and telling him so, and going to his house, but she was guilty of the additional offence of keeping Montana away from the place where Mrs. Trescoe was anxiously looking out for him.

Marion was determined that the moment Trescoe came up from the North, he and Katherine should go off to the Continent at once, and he sincerely hoped that they would not come back until Montana had crossed the Atlantic. 'Then,' he thought, 'things will come right again. To-morrow, or at farthest the day after, everything would come right.' With Captain Marion's buoyancy of temperament, things were always coming right again to-morrow, or the day after at the farthest. But he looked worn and sad. Geraldine had seen him thus of late, and had been greatly troubled.

She said as much: 'I am so sorry for you, Captain Marion. You try to make everyone happy, and you ought to be so happy yourself; and yet I know you are greatly distressed by all this. It is very hard on you.'

'Well, for the matter of that, it is a good deal harder upon you, Geraldine; for you are young, and I brought you over here for

a holiday, and it doesn't seem likely to be much of a holiday after all. If your mother only knew, she would have a good right to scold me; only I don't believe she ever scolded anyone in her life.'

'I must return to her very soon,' Geraldine said; 'I am afraid she must miss me.'

'There, I knew!' Marion exclaimed. 'I knew you would want to get back at once. I expected that; I only wanted that! You are the only person who keeps us alive here—I haven't another rational creature to speak a word to; and now you are talking about going back to America!'

'I don't like to desert you, indeed, Captain Marion; but I am always thinking of my mother; and I think I ought to go home, for many reasons.'

'Yes, yes, I know some of them; and I know how dreadfully stupid things are here for a young woman——'

'No, no; it isn't that,' Geraldine pleaded warmly.

'Well, I don't believe it is; but of course it is natural you should want to get back to your home—although it isn't your home, after all. America isn't your home. Why can't you make your home here?'

Then Marion suddenly stopped, remembering what Katherine had said, and what, according to her account, many others were saying. He was afraid Geraldine might misunderstand him, and become embarrassed.

'I don't see why Mrs. Rowan might not come over and live in England,' he said. 'She has friends enough here, I am sure.'

'Her idea was,' Geraldine explained, 'that there is a better opening for young women in America than here. You see, Captain Marion, I can't always lead this easy, pleasant kind of life——'

'Pleasant!' Marion interjected. 'Mighty pleasant some of us have made it for you!'

'I shall have to do something,' she went on, without noticing his interruption. 'My mother has only a small income; and it is only for—for herself.' Geraldine could not bear to say 'for her own life.' 'I shall have to do something. I can do a good many things in a sort of way; and I could get on better out in America than here, where there are ever so many women who can do all I can, and a great deal better. So we thought of fixing ourselves in the States.'

'But you'll never have to do anything. You are certain to get married, Geraldine.'

Geraldine coloured slightly and shook her head.

'Well, at all events your mother doesn't expect you just yet. She was quite willing to leave you in our charge for twelve months at least, and there's a long time of that to run. You must not talk of leaving just yet. I could not do without you now.'

'I should not like to leave you,' Geraldine said simply,—'at least until you can do without me.'

'My dear girl,' Marion asked impulsively, 'I wonder when that would be? I want you very much; you are the only reasonable being I have now to talk to. I am not so very happy in my girls as I expected to be. Perhaps I oughtn't to speak of this even to you, Geraldine, but I have got into the way of telling you everything. You see, we don't get on together so well, my girls and I; we don't hit it off as I hoped we might do. Katherine has changed greatly—one can't help seeing that—and Sydney is so undemonstrative and cold. I dare say she is affectionate enough, but she doesn't show it; and something is troubling her now, I think, and she doesn't tell me, and there is no confidence between us. So I wish you to stay as long as you can, Geraldine. I really can't spare you at present. Odd that I should talk in this way, but really I should miss you much more than one of my own daughters.'

'I wish I were your daughter,' said Geraldine.

'So do I. At least—' Then he hesitated for a moment. 'At least, I know I am just as fond of you as if you were.'

'And I am very fond of you,' said Geraldine warmly, 'and I shall be sorry to leave you, whenever it is to be. You have always been so kind and good to me, and I feel as if I had known you since I was a child. I suppose your being my father's friend makes me feel so, but I don't feel the same to anyone else.'

A strange sensation went through Marion's heart as he looked into the girl's face and saw her so beautiful, so affectionate, and so out-spoken. 'If she really cares for no one—for no young man,' he thought, 'why should she ever go away? Could she do any better than stay here?'

At the same moment a thought like that was passing through Geraldine's own mind. 'He has been better than a brother to me. I am not in love with anybody. I wish I were. Nobody that I care for is likely to be in love with me. If it would make him happy that I should stay with him always, why should I not do so? It would delight my mother, I know. The world begins to be very blank and dreary. I don't care

to look far forward. What could I do better than this, if it would please him? What could I do better than devote my life to him?'

Some light of the thought that was in both their minds must have passed from the eyes of one to the eyes of the other.

'Do you know what people have been saying of us, Geraldine?' he asked, and he took her hand in his.

She answered 'No,' but she could not keep from blushing.

'They say I am very fond of you, my dear, and that I want to marry you. I don't wonder at their saying it, Geraldine; although it made me angry on your account. Why should a girl like you marry a man like me? You would look for twenty times my merits and half my years; wouldn't you?'

He had taken both her hands in his now, and he looked appealingly into her eyes. There was a moment of silence. He waited patiently. He knew she understood him. She could hardly speak. The tumult in her 'fighting soul' was too much for her as yet; and still, she had been expecting this, somehow, for many minutes before Marion's words were spoken. Spoken as they were, and by him, the words were a proposal of marriage.

'You don't answer,' Marion said; 'you are not angry with me, Geraldine?'

'Oh no—how could I be angry? Yes, if you would really like it—if it would please you—to have me for your wife, I will marry you, Captain Marion, with—with pleasure.'

A strange, keen pang went through Marion's heart—a mingled joy and pain. Geraldine, then, was willing to marry him, at his age; that beautiful, proud girl! But she did not love him. She would marry him to please him, and also, he was sure, to be free for ever from the importunity of one whom she feared. She did not pretend to love him; she had made her meaning clear enough in the fewest words—if he liked her enough to make her his wife, he might have her. Well, it ought to be happiness to him to have her on any terms. She would make his life happy. His daughters could not make him happy any more. His hopes that way had all gone.

'You are sure that you are quite willing, Geraldine? I don't ask you if you love me; I suppose I have passed the age for being loved——'

'I am very fond of you,' Geraldine truly said.

'And you are really willing?'

'I am really willing. I am very grateful.'

He pressed her hand to his lips. Somehow, he did not venture

to kiss her, although she had promised to be his wife. But Geraldine drew towards him and, her face crimsoning all over, she kissed him. He grew as red as a boy might do.

'My sweet, darling girl!' was all he could say for a moment. Then he told her that he would leave her to herself to think this all over; and he was on the brink of saying that if she found she did not quite like it he would not hold her to her word. But he stopped himself, remembering that this might seem almost an insult to the girl.'

'What will your mother say?' he asked.

'She will be glad,' Geraldine answered simply.

This was a relief and a joy to Marion. He kept his word, and left Geraldine for the moment. When their conversation was beginning, Marion would have held any man or woman mad who suggested the possibility of its ending as it did—of Geraldine Rowan consenting to be his wife, or, indeed, of his allowing himself to ask her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

'AN' 'TWERE TO GIVE AGAIN—BUT 'TIS NO MATTER.'

GERALDINE sat for a while listless and thoughtful. The excitement of her sudden impulse had gone from her and left her in a condition of mental reaction, almost of collapse. She was not sorry for what she had done. She still felt that it was the right thing to do. In that, as in many other events of her life, she had acted entirely on impulse, and she had no misgivings as yet about this impulse. It would please Captain Marion, she thought, and make him happy; and what better use could she turn her life to than to make him happy? She saw that he was not happy with his daughters, and that he was not likely to be, and at any rate Sydney would probably soon marry and leave him. He was far too young to be left to a lonely life—too young in spirit and heart, at least; too young even in years. It would please her mother, Geraldine thought. Mrs. Rowan looked on Captain Marion as her dearest friend. It was nothing of a sacrifice, for Marion was not really an old man, and Geraldine told herself that she did not feel as young as her years, and life might possibly be a hard struggle enough for her mother and for herself if she did not marry. Then there was the certainty of escaping any further persecution from Montana. The moment it was known that she was engaged to Captain Marion, her soul and spirit would be free from the depressing influence

that had seemed of late to be weighing her fatally down. All things considered, she again told herself she had done right, and that she could not but be glad. But how is it with a young woman who has just promised to marry a man, and has to begin to reassure herself that moment, telling her soul that she has done right, that she is certain to be happy, that she has no excuse for repentance or regret?

Geraldine started from her dreamy, depressed mood as a door opened and a servant came in with a card. Why did she turn so red when she looked at the name? Why was she so embarrassed? Why did she get up and go to the window and look away from the servant while hastily saying that the owner of the card was to be admitted to see her? The sudden sensation that passed through Geraldine's heart at the moment brought the first doubt with it. She had never thought of this before; she did not dare to allow her mind to dwell upon it now. But it is certain that a strange sharp pang of regret, and of something like shame, shot through her heart as she took the card in her hand and read the name of 'Clement Hope.'

Then there came a sudden reaction—a rush of feeling the other way. 'I can be so kind and friendly with him now,' she said to herself; 'I may be as friendly as ever I please, and I can do a great many things to help him and to make him happy, and Captain Marion will assist me.' She became confident and courageous again at the thought. 'A married woman can do so much that a girl must not attempt to do. I shall make myself ever so useful to him, as well as to others. Yes, I have done right. I know now that I have done right. I wonder what will he think? I wonder will he be glad—will he care at all? Perhaps I might do something for him with Melissa. But, oh, that's impossible! Melissa is not fit for him any more.'

Clement Hope entered the room. Geraldine had not seen him since that sad grey morning when she ran away back into the dismal house where Mr. Varlowe lay dead, rather than meet him face to face and look on him while he heard the news that the kind old man had died in his absence.

Clement was more embarrassed than she, which was but natural. He was cruelly conscious of being in love with her, and he was ashamed to think that she must have known of his imaginary passion for Melissa; that perhaps she believed in it still. He began the conversation by talking of the fine weather. Geraldine, however, cut this short very promptly. She received him with a cordiality the most frank and warm. She looked at

him with sympathetic eyes. He had grown paler and thinner, she thought, and more like a picture by Andrea del Sarto than ever. They talked for a while of the Marions, and Mr. Trescoe and Mr. Aquitaine. Geraldine was at first in doubt whether it was well to speak of Melissa, but it occurred to her that if she said nothing about the girl it might lead Clement to suppose that she knew of his hopeless passion; and so she thought the best thing was to speak of Miss Aquitaine as of anyone else. Clement coloured a little when she first mentioned Melissa, but not for the reason that Geraldine might have supposed.

So far, both he and Geraldine had seemed instinctively to avoid the mention of Montana's name. Geraldine had distinct reasons for wishing to keep that name as much as possible out of her thoughts, and Clement had his reasons, undefined but strong. Still, they could not talk over things in general very long, without sooner or later being forced to say something of Montana. Each, after a while, became conscious that both were unwilling to come to the subject, and that it would have to be come to; and the result was that before long they stumbled on it awkwardly.

'Have you seen Mr. Montana of late?' Geraldine asked.

No, Clement said, he had not seen him. 'I suppose I ought to go and see him, but I don't know. I don't quite know yet what I mean to do with myself. I must turn to an active life of some kind. You see, Miss Rowan, my father, as I like to call him, brought me up in a way very pleasant to me, but not likely to make a man well fitted for an active career. He was very fond of me; he was only too good and kind to me; and now he is gone, I don't feel as if I were good for much. But I mean to try. I mean to turn to and do something. I shan't hang about the world as I used to do, thinking I was going to be a poet, or a painter, or an author of some kind, and making no approach to anything. I don't mean to think any more of poetry, or painting, or authorship. I mean to go in for a career of some energy, at all events.'

'I thought,' she said, 'you had made up your mind to throw in your lot with Mr. Montana, and to be one of his helpers in the new colony. That would be a great scheme, wouldn't it—I mean, if it could be carried out.'

'Yes, if it could be carried out,' said Clement, speaking each word slowly and with difficulty—'if it could be carried out; but I have been growing rather sceptical lately.'

'Only growing sceptical lately?' Geraldine asked.

'Yes, only growing sceptical. I was a great believer in it. You were not, I suppose?' he asked, looking suddenly at her.

'No,' Geraldine answered; 'I never believed in it, and I never believed in him. Don't think me too womanish in my instincts, and don't think that I am only jumping to conclusions, as men say women always do, but I never had much faith in Mr. Montana. I know you had once; have you now?'

'I wish you hadn't asked me that,' Clement said. 'I don't like to ask myself. There is no reason in the world why I shouldn't have just as much faith in him now as I ever had; but then——'

'But then——' Geraldine said; 'quite so; but then——. There it is. I am glad to her the "but then," Mr. Hope—it is the best piece of news I have heard for some time, and indeed I have not heard much that was pleasant lately. I am sincerely glad that you have ceased to put your faith in Mr. Montana.'

'I don't know how it is, or why; I haven't any reason. Nothing has happened. He ought to be the same to me. But somehow he is not, and there's an end of it. Something seems to stand between him and me. I dread going to see him. I dread his coming to see me.'

'Is that,' she asked, 'perhaps, because it was owing to him that you were sent out of the house at a wrong time that morning—that dismal, melancholy morning?'

'I don't know,' Clement said. 'I don't think it is because of that. That may have been the beginning of it. But that surely was no fault of his. It can't be that. But ever since that morning I cannot bring myself to the same feeling for Montana. You will think me very ridiculous, Miss Rowan, but at the present moment my one strong desire is never to see him again.'

'Then, why should you see him again?' said Geraldine. 'Why not avoid seeing him? Take my word for it, Mr. Hope, you are better without seeing him. I wish I were never to see him again. I would give a great deal to be able to get away from London and never see him again.'

'Shall I tell him what I saw and heard that morning?' she asked of herself. 'Would it be right? Would it not be right? I cannot be mistaken. I did hear Montana call that poor old man "father"; I did hear the old man welcome him as his son.' Then again, she thought it better the whole thing should rest, and be as a dream for her. To what end recalling a miserable, torturing question? It could but make Clement unhappy. If he needed to be warned against Montana, there might be good reason; now it would only be to distract and distress him for nothing.

'But I haven't come to pay you a mere formal call,' Clement suddenly said. 'I want to tell you what I am going to do.' Then he went to work and explained his plans. Geraldine listened with an interest which kindled as he went along. Soon she became thoroughly absorbed in his projects, and delighted with the spirit in which they were conceived. This was exactly what she would have him to do. With all her dislike and mistrust of Montana, there had always been a certain fascination about his scheme, even for her. It seemed so noble in its purpose, and at the same time so practical in its beneficence; and now it was especially charming to her to find an idea of the same kind taken up by Clement in a sort of rivalry. She not only wished him success; she felt sure that he must succeed. She saw him in a new light. All the half-sensuous languor of his character seemed to have gone, and he had become a strong, brave, enterprising young man, with the loftiest purposes and the most resolute determination. She wondered how she could ever have so misread his character as not to see from the first the courage, earnestness, and purpose that were in him. Then she began to ask herself whether, after all, she ever did misread him, and whether, even from the first, she had not had the same impression, that he was made for something much better than to play spaniel to the whims and pretty humours of a girl like Melissa Aquitaine.

'This is the reason,' she kept saying to herself, 'why I always thought him too good for her. I knew there was much more in him than he showed on the surface. I knew that he was made for something better than to waste his time over amateur efforts at poetry and art.'

She began to feel proud of him now, and proud of her own friendship for him, and of the evident sincerity of his friendship for her. Clement, for his part, was delighted beyond measure at the interest she showed in his plans and the sympathy she gave to his ambition. He felt happy beyond expression. Every word she spoke was so kind, so sympathetic, so tender in its interest, that the poor youth felt his head quite turned with wonder and delight. A new world was opening upon him out of the ruins of his old world. The light that fell upon his path seemed all roseate and divine.

'Be sure,' Geraldine said, 'you don't do anything in this without coming to me and telling me of it first. We must talk over everything together. I am sure I can help you—I mean,' she added hastily, 'we can help you;' for what she was think-

ing of was that Marion would, for Clement's sake and for her sake, withdraw his interest from Montana's scheme, and give it all to Clement.

Need it be said that Clement readily promised to consult her in everything?

Geraldine was growing buoyantly happy for the moment as they sat and talked. It delighted her to think that now she could openly assist Clement's plans and be his avowed friend. Now that her own destiny was settled, no misunderstanding could come of any friendship, however frank, that she might express for the young man. She would be able to withdraw the sympathies of Marion altogether from Montana. Clement Hope, Marion, and herself all rescued at once from Montana's influence —this, indeed, she thought, would be a bright change.

Wild and wilder hopes were meanwhile floating up in Clement's mind. Her emphatic kindliness, her almost tender expressions of sympathy, were utterly misunderstood by him. Already in fancy he saw Geraldine Rowan the partner of all his purposes and his schemes. He saw a bright future with him and her together, and all the rest of the world standing apart. He saw a shining path, along which they two were to walk arm in arm and heart in heart. But that he thought it would be premature, and in his peculiar position unseemly, he felt inclined then and there to make open love to the girl and to claim her love in return. But he dared not venture on this just yet. 'It will come,' he told himself in rapture; 'it is sure to come. It has almost come already.' He was very happy. When he was going away, she pressed his hand with a warm and almost affectionate pressure. That meant on her part, 'I may be openly your friend now, for I never can be anything else.' To him it seemed to say, 'Trust me; I shall be with you always.' So he went away in a tumult of hope and delight, and she stole to her bedroom and shut herself in there and sat for a while in thought, and found that in spite of herself tears had come into her eyes. They were not tears of mere unhappiness. She did not repent of what she had done, now that she had seen Clement. On the contrary, his visit strengthened her in the conviction that she had done right. What though he was a generous and noble young man, with a high purpose and force of character—a young man that any girl might love and be proud of loving? His heart was gone; it was given away—thrown away on a girl who cared nothing for him, and who was not worthy of him. Poor Clement! he loved Melissa Aquitaine

so deeply and hopelessly still ; and he was determined to struggle with that futile love like a man, and go out into the great thrilling world of enterprise and do something worthy of a man. So Geraldine kept saying to herself, and so she believed ; and it was for this reason that she felt more convinced than ever that she had done right in consenting to marry Captain Marion.

Meantime, Captain Marion himself was not perhaps so entirely happy as one ought to be who is about to renew his youth in the sweetness of a romantic marriage. He did not like having to talk about his intended marriage to anyone. He dreaded having to make such a communication to his daughters. He was in a bewilderment of joy and hope and doubt. 'What will people say?' he could not help asking himself. Would they talk of May and December? Would they say much about his age? Would anyone remark that there was no fool like an old fool? A painful memory of some scenes in Molière's 'Mariage Forcé' came into his mind. He thought of the elderly lover in that masterpiece of grim sardonic humour. He wondered whether in some people's eyes he might not look a little like the hero of the play ; but he thought, 'At all events, nobody can say that Geraldine is like the heroine.' He dreaded the pert commentary of his daughter Katherine, and her complacent declarations that it only proved that she had been right from the beginning. He dreaded Sydney's cold and complaining looks. He wondered what Aquitaine would say and what Montana would think. He had acted wholly upon impulse, exactly as Geraldine had done for her part. But somehow, the surrender to impulse which seems touching, engaging, and even noble, on the part of a woman, looks only feeble and foolish in a man. Captain Marion was not a strong man in any sense. There was a good deal of the feminine in his sweet and sunny temperament. When his talk with Geraldine began, he had not had the faintest notion of where it was to lead ; and in all probability, but for Katherine Trescoe's previous suggestion, it never would have led whither it did. He was drawn on step by step. He saw that Geraldine was perplexed and unhappy, with, perhaps, a dreary life spreading out before her.

He felt that he could not lose her society without a great sense of sacrifice, and he thought on the whole it would be better for him and for her that they should not part, and thus he was led to his offer, which, perhaps to his surprise, she so readily accepted. He knew very well she did not love him, and he had even yet good sense enough left to know that at his

age he was not likely to be the object of a girl's love. Sometimes he told himself, as Othello does, that his decline into the vale of years was not much. He was still, in a certain limited sense, a comparatively young man—for a middle-aged man. Victor Hugo prefers fifty years to forty, on the ground that fifty is the youth of old age, whereas forty is the old age of youth. Captain Marion was still fairly in the youth of old age, and it was not yet out of the nature of things that a woman might be found who, taking him all round, would think him worth falling in love with. But it was not likely that a girl of Geraldine Rowan's youth and brilliancy and vivid temperament should fall in love with a gentleman of his years, with whom she had been living almost like a daughter for months back. At all events, it was certain that she was not in love with him—did not profess or pretend to be. She liked him enough to be willing to marry him, and that was all. He was in doubtful and troubled mood, for all his happiness, and had to tell himself that he had done the right thing, and that he was perfectly happy, in order to be quite assured on both subjects. To one person he made up his mind the news must be told at once. He would let Montana know of what had happened without delay, for Geraldine's sake and for Montana's own sake. It must be made known that Geraldine was open to no further love-making on the part of anyone. Captain Marion would put that to Montana in clear, firm, and kindly words, and Geraldine would be relieved from any further unwelcome pressure. On that point Marion felt no hesitation or fear. He did not mind facing Montana or any man on that or any other subject. He was afraid of Katherine and afraid of Sydney, but the lords of creation had no terrors for him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JUPITER AND SEMELE.

The season was drawing to a close. The path of the comet was nearly traced. Montana now had set his mind on nothing better than an honourable retreat, a brilliant going-out, a departure in something like effulgence, leaving a noble afterglow behind it. He could see plainly enough that the interest and the excitement about him were not to be kept up much longer. By the time the next season came, even if he were in England—and he had determined not to be in England—some new hero of the hour would have been found, some new question in

science, or theology, or economics, on spiritualism would engage the attention of the world. He felt satisfied that he had done the best he could, and all he could. He was not displeased, on the whole, with the part he had played; only, he wanted to leave the stage with the applause of the spectators, and to remain a distinct and gracious memory in their minds. Even this he began to see would require some tact and some courage to accomplish.

Many things were against him. He had done nothing whatever to advance the great enterprise in the name of which he had come from the New World to the Old. He had hardly bestowed a thought upon it during his London season. It had never had shape enough to make it necessary for him to think much about it. It was a cloud floating in cloudland, and seemed to be growing smaller and vaguer, not larger and more compact, as the time went on. Now that he was compelled to make up his mind and to turn his thoughts to it, and that the hour had come when he must decide whether he would go on or abandon the project, it seemed clear to him that it was unmanageable, for the present at least, and that some means must be found for releasing him from the discredit of having tried and failed. Half-fanatic and half-playactor as he had been from the first, his mind was as much set on keeping up the illusion about himself, and leaving fame and credit behind him among those he knew in London, as if that fame and credit were a substance in themselves, or could, under such conditions, be anything better than firework and jugglery.

He was anxious now that the plot, whatever it were, against him should explode at once. He wanted to have the thing out and be done with it. He did not feel much fear of the result. There was no evidence he could think of which could possibly convict him of any deception. He had only to stand fast and keep composed, as he was pretty sure to do, maintaining that he was what he said he was and nothing else, and it seemed absolutely impossible that anyone could confute him. He knew he would have believers always, even in the teeth of very strong substantial evidence, and did not see how such strong substantial evidence could possibly be obtained.

Once that explosion was over, he would be free to go back to America; and before that came, he could not stir. He was much perplexed at the time by the incessant visits and importunities of poor Matthew Starr. Starr came to him or wrote to him almost every day, entreating to know how the great scheme

was going on, where in America they were to pitch their tents, and when they were to start for the new home. Starr was made miserable and impatient by the misery and impatience of his daughter, who was eating her heart out with querulousness, and was making him eat his heart out too. He watched over the girl with a sickening terror day and night. He was afraid that at last she would cease to believe in Montana and his great new world, and in her despair would fling herself back to her old life, and leave her father.

Sometimes the old man's impatience took the form of vehement doubt, and he came and challenged and questioned Montana as though he were some stern inquisitor endeavouring to extort confession from a prejudged culprit. It took all Montana's composure and patience and temper to be able to bear with the rough old Chartist. There were times when Starr went so far as to threaten Montana that some terrible judgment would come on him if he had deceived poor men and women, and if the great scheme was not to go forward after all.

'Look here, Mr. Montana,' he said once, fiercely striking his fist on Montana's table; 'I have set my heart on this, and I have staked my daughter's soul on it, and if we are to be deceived in this, by God, I'll go mad, and I'll do something dreadful—I know I shall. But you can't be deceiving me; you are not deceiving me. Oh, do tell us when this is to come off!'

Montana could only reassure him in the old words, which were evidently beginning to lose their influence, and this sort of thing had to be gone through many times in the course of a week. Montana wrote to Mr. Aquitaine a friendly half-apologetic letter, in which, without coming directly to the question of poor Melissa's escapade, he expressed his earnest wish that Aquitaine should believe him free of any responsibility for what had happened; and Aquitaine wrote to him again, a cold, sad letter, in which he said he could attach no blame to Montana, but only wished they had never met. One thing Montana was determined on—it should not be his fault if he did not carry Geraldine with him when he returned to America. He had set his heart on this, and he believed he could accomplish it. If he should succeed in that, his time in London would not have been lost. There would be a sensation of success about the visit, let it end as it otherwise might. In most other ways he was beginning to feel that failure threatened him. He really had of late grown to be passionate in his love for the girl and his desire to conquer her affection. He had resolved that he would appeal to her con-

fidence, tell her everything she cared to know about him, persuade her that he had a high deliberate motive for everything he did, and endeavour thus to win her respect for his steady purpose and his strength of will. This resolve of his was made partly in obedience to impulse—the sudden strange impulse of a lonely man to take some one into his confidence; and partly, too, it was founded on that calculation of which we have spoken already—the calculation that a girl like Geraldine Rowan was to be subdued only by some one who should show a strength of will before which any purpose of hers must bend. He would prove to the girl that he was made to be the master of her will, that she could not escape from him. Besides, when he had told her all, he need care nothing about Trescoe's investigations. Geraldine, in his confidence, would be with him, and not against him. What woman is ungrateful to the man who trusts her with all his secrets?

The first moment when Montana saw Geraldine on the deck of the steamer in New York bay, he was drawn to her in a manner strange to him—indeed, unknown to him before. She had from that moment a profound interest for him which grew and grew every day. He spoke but the truth when he said that from the moment when he first saw her he was determined, if he could, to have her for his wife. In all his varied career, he had not felt like this to any woman before. Geraldine was a strange disturbing element in his calculations, distracting the arrangements of his life. He had not counted on anything like this. He thought he could move about amongst men and women as if they were some inanimate instruments of his purposes. He had never thought of the possibility of some influence coming in on him to disturb his plans and projects. He had been loved by so many women without loving them in return, that the possibility of his falling in love had not lately entered his mind. Now that the possibility had become a reality, it filled him with a strange blending of delight and vexation. He was angry with himself sometimes at the thought that the attraction of a woman could thus disturb and distract him; and yet, at the same time, the novelty of the sensation brought a curious joy that penetrated his soul, and made him feel as if he were renewing his youth. So he resolved that he would go and see Geraldine, and bring her to a decision, and he scarcely doubted that the decision would be as he wished it. He was filled beforehand with the assurance of success. That success would repay him for failure of any other kind. It would open a new life to him. Why, he asked himself, should he not give up all his plans and schemes, his

futile ambition to govern the minds and careers of men, his idle wish to stand alone and apart upon a pinnacle above the crowd? Why should he care any longer to be the comet of a season?

The memory came back upon him of the time when he had heard those words quoted long ago in the northern city. He remembered the loving tender admiration which strove to turn his ambition away from the mere desire to blaze the comet of a season. Would it not have been better if he had taken the lesson then? Life, after all, had since that time been but an empty, lonely kind of work for him. But in the depths of his heart he was glad he now was free, and could ask Geraldine Rowan to marry him. Why should he not live happily, quietly, with her, and begin for the first time to find enjoyment and peace in life? He began to grow almost sentimental. His mood was idyllic. The future looked flowery and bright and serene. Strange that at the very same moment Geraldine Rowan, herself full of dejection and perplexity, was filling the minds of two men with the happy conviction that she was made by Providence for them. Led by this thought, Montana was setting forth on his mission when a letter from Captain Marion was put into his hands which sent a thrill through him. He read it again and again before he had satisfied himself that he fully understood its meaning. But there it was, clear as written language could make it—Geraldine Rowan was engaged to marry Captain Marion; and Captain Marion said, in friendly but firm words, that any further visits from Montana would be unwelcome to her.

When the moment came to do anything, Montana was not a man to hesitate. He went to Marion's house at once and asked to see Miss Rowan. He bade the maid not to tell Miss Rowan who it was that wanted her; but merely to say that she was wanted. His quiet subduing manner was irresistible, and the woman obeyed him without a word or a doubt. Geraldine was simply told that some one wanted to speak to her in the drawing-room, and she came down not thinking of anything in particular. She was, for a moment, almost alarmed when she saw Montana, and her eyes met his. She knew that he had heard of what had happened. She had to compel her courage to stand by her.

'Is this true that I hear of you?' Montana asked abruptly.

Most other women would probably have avoided the question by asking, 'What do you hear about me?' but Geraldine did not care to affect not to understand him.

'It is true,' she said coldly.

'Why have you done it?' he asked. 'What mad impulse could have possessed you? You are making your life unhappy.'

'No,' she answered, 'I am not making my life unhappy. I don't think I should much mind if I were, so long as I had the sense of trying to make somebody else happy. But I shall not be unhappy. I shall be well content.'

'You, with your youth and your beauty and your high principles, are you really going to sacrifice yourself in that way? Somebody ought to interfere who has authority over you. It is shocking. It is shameful of Marion. I did not think he could have done it.'

'Because he is so much older than I?' Geraldine asked bitterly.

'Yes; that for one reason,' he said. 'He is too much older than you. You look at me; but I am a good deal younger than Marion, and I had something to offer which he never could have. Life would have been worth having with me.'

'Life will be worth having with him. He will be kind and loving to me, and I shall be loving and devoted to him.'

'But you cannot feel love for him, for a man of his years, with grown-up daughters as old as you—older than you, for anything I know. It is impossible. There is nothing in him to deserve a young woman's love. It is monstrous. You trample on every true principle by such an arrangement. It is only an arrangement. What on earth has driven you to such a step?'

'You have driven me to it,' she said, 'if you want to know the truth—you, and nobody else. You persecuted me. You told me that you would not cease to persecute me; and more than that, you made me afraid that my own will was not free. You always told me so. You told me that you would never let me go. Well, I was glad to find any way of breaking through such servitude as that. I would rather be dead than married to you, Mr. Montana: you can easily think how much rather I would live and be married to Captain Marion, for whom I have affection—yes, true affection. If you are really sorry for me, blame yourself. You are the cause.'

'This can be undone; it is not too late.'

'No,' Geraldine firmly said, 'it shall not be undone by me or by anyone for me. It should not be undone, if there were no other reason, so long as you were on this side of the Atlantic. You have destroyed my life, Mr. Montana, if that is any good to you.'

This might have seemed a little inconsistent, if Montana had

been in a mood for noticing inconsistency. Just a moment before the girl had said that she would be perfectly happy, and that she looked forward with full contentment to her life in the future. Now she spoke of her life as destroyed, and by him. There could be little doubt from the tone of her voice which sentiment more truly expressed what she felt.

Montana was touched by her pathetic, half-unconscious expression. 'Is that true?' he asked gravely. 'Have I really been the cause of your destroying your life in this way? Have I been so fatal to you?'

'You have,' Geraldine answered sadly; 'you have been fatal to me, and I think to everyone else you came near—here, at all events. You have wrecked the happiness of all our group. We were very happy and fond and bound together till you came, and now there is nothing but disunion and distrust and bitterness. Don't think about me; think about others who are far greater sufferers. I am content on the whole. I shall be happy enough.'

'You said this moment that your life was destroyed; and I know you spoke the truth. I know your life is destroyed. I hate to think of the prospect before you. Poor girl! so young and so charming, and so utterly thrown away! Who would not feel sorry for you? I did not think the fate of any woman could trouble me so much; and indeed, if I am the cause of it in any way whatever, I am sorry for it.'

'Why did you persecute me?' she asked vehemently.

'Because I thought so much of you,' he said. 'Because I saw in you what I never saw in any other woman; and because I loved you as truly and as deeply as I could love anybody; more than I ever did love anyone before; and because I thought you would be a prize to have.'

'Yes,' Geraldine interrupted him, 'because you thought that I would be a prize to have! I don't know why you thought that, or what prize I could be to anyone. But you thought so, and that was the reason why you persecuted me. It was not love for me. I don't believe it; I never did. It was because I showed that I had no trust in you, and because I kept away from you, and you were determined to conquer and to have your way. It was your own vanity all the time, Mr. Montana, and not any love for me. I could forgive it, I could excuse it, if I thought it was even selfish love for me. But it was not—it was love for yourself; it was vanity—vanity that is in every word you say and every thing you do. You have made my life

a sacrifice to your vanity as you have made others, and you will have to sacrifice yourself to it in the end.'

Montana never before admired her so much as now, when she was declaiming against him with unwonted energy and passion, and with all the eloquence which emotion lends to impulsive women. After all, there was a sort of complacent satisfaction in the thought that, if she was sacrificing herself to Captain Marion, it was not for Captain Marion's sake, but only because she dreaded Montana's too fatal influence. She was escaping from him like some classical nymph escaping from a pursuing divinity, and rushing she knew not whither. Yes; there was a certain gratification to Montana's vanity in the thought, and out of satisfied vanity perhaps he became more kindly towards her and more anxious to do something that might soften her.

'Is there anything,' he said, 'I can do by way of atonement —supposing this wretched, cruel bargain is to be carried out?'

'Only one thing,' he said, 'you could possibly do for me.'

'What is that?' he asked eagerly.

'Go away from me, and let me not see you any more.'

He turned upon her. 'You talk of suffering, and yet you seem to have no feeling whatever for my suffering in all this. Do you think it is nothing for me to have striven for you and to have lost you? Do you think it is nothing for me to see you given over to one who is entirely below your level; who, good and kind creature though he is, is absurdly unworthy of you? Do you think the very failure is nothing to me? Do you think I don't feel this, Geraldine? If your life is destroyed, so is mine. I care nothing about that. I am too deeply disappointed. You are the only woman for whom I ever really cared in all my life, and you have turned against me; and now you tell me that the only thing I can do for you is never to see you again!'

'Think of others,' she said vehemently, 'to whom you have done still more wrong.'

'What others?' Montana asked. 'You don't mean poor Melissa Aquitaine? If she is unhappy, you know I had no part in that. You know, and nobody knows so well as you, that I was not to blame. Don't be unjust to me, Geraldine.'

'If you had not come near us she would be happy.'

For a moment Montana felt as if he were restored to the very best and purest days of his youth—to the days when, mingling in with all manner of personal aims and schemes and dreams for his own advancement and greatness, there was still some silver thread of devotion to the higher principles of honour and purity

and love. It seemed for a time as if this sense had come back to him, and as if, after all, success in the world, and notoriety or fame or whatever it might be, were things not so satisfying to the soul as the conviction that one has done a generous deed.

He was really touched by Geraldine's unhappiness and by her resolve not to withdraw from the burden she had brought upon herself.

'I wish I had seen you earlier, Geraldine,' he said, 'if that could have been possible. I wish I had known you when I was a young man, and that you could have been young then, or that I was young now, and beginning all over again. I think you are a woman with whom an ambitious man might have gone on honourably and well, and not have failed in his ambition either. I am sorry to see you throw yourself away, and I am sorry, deeply sorry, if it is my fault.'

'You will soon forget me,' Geraldine said. 'This mood won't last long. You will return to your own schemes and your own ambitions, and you will think very little of me.'

'I shall never forget you. Do not mistake me, Geraldine. I mean what I say now. I feel it. I am not really the kind of hypocrite you believe me to be. I have a destiny, and I must fulfil it.'

Geraldine smiled sadly, and shook her head. 'I don't believe in destiny,' she said.

'Well, well,' Montana answered, 'we'll not argue about that, Geraldine. I have a way appointed me, and I mean to tread it. But one may stop on the way and grieve for some one whom he sees in distress. So I feel for you. I pray for your forgiveness; and I will do something that you will be pleased with. I am going to do it now, and to stand by it, just as you stand by what you have done.'

He held his hand out. She gave him hers. Before she could withdraw it he had raised it to his lips respectfully, and with a not obtrusive suggestion of tenderness and melancholy. Then he left her, and she wondered what it was that he was going to do which was to please her.

Montana met Melissa's maid on the stairs. He knew the girl very well by sight.

'Is Miss Aquitaine in?' he asked.

Yes, Miss Aquitaine was in; she was in the library.

'Can I see her?' Then he stopped, and said, 'No; don't announce me. I will go and see her myself.'

He went to the library and opened the door without knocking,

and he saw Melissa seated on the library steps. She had evidently had a book in her hand, but it had fallen to the floor, and lay there on its face with outspread covers.

Melissa looked up when she heard the sound of the opening door. She turned crimson at sight of Montana. He went straight to her without saying a word until he had come close beside her, and he took her by both hands as she rose.

'Melissa,' he said, 'I have come to ask you something. You told me before that you cared for me and would be willing to join your fate with mine. I have come now to ask you, Will you marry me and go out to America with me? If you say you will, I will write to your father at once. I think he will not refuse his consent.'

Melissa's heart beat with wild surprise, with joy and hope, and with fear as well. She looked wistfully into his face. It was not the face of a lover. It was the face of one who feels compassion, and who thinks he is performing a duty. But after all the poor little girl never expected to find a lover in him; that she had always known to be quite out of the question. She would as soon have expected that some mythological deity should come down from the clouds of sunset and offer himself as her lover. It would be happiness and heaven, she thought, to take Montana on any terms, to be tied a captive to the chariot-wheel of his fortunes. And yet there was in her nature, with all its passionate impulse and its weakness and its whim, something womanly enough to make her blush and shrink back from the thought of being thus taken on sufferance and out of pity.

'Oh, Mr. Montana,' she murmured, 'this is too much. I did not expect this. I'm not prepared for it; and I am not worthy of you, or fit for you. I know it. You ought to marry somebody else. You ought to marry——' Then she stopped, and set her little teeth firmly, and got out the words with great difficulty, 'You ought to marry Geraldine Rowan.'

Some tremor, however slight, must have passed over Montana's face, for Melissa said at once, 'And you would have married her, perhaps, but she would not? Yes, she is a strange, odd girl; proud, and not miserable and abject like me. She would not marry you, and so you have come to me? Is that true, Mr. Montana?'

'It is true,' Montana said, 'since you ask me. I will not conceal it. There is a great deal about Geraldine Rowan that I always thought would make her well-suited for me and for my purposes. But I did not conceal this from you before, Melissa,

and I don't know why you should mind it now. You told me that you cared about me at a time when you must have known this, and why shouldn't you care about me still? All I can say is, that if you will marry me I shall be glad of it; and I shall be proud of it too, Melissa,' he added; 'any man might well be proud of such devotion as yours. You risked a great deal to do me some good. Why may I not show that I am grateful? This is the only way in which I can show it, and so I ask you, Will you marry me, Melissa?'

Melissa did not answer for a moment. Passionate conflicting thoughts were struggling within her. 'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'I wish I had the courage and the spirit to refuse you, Mr. Montana! It is beggarly in a girl to give herself on such terms. You only take me out of compassion. But I haven't the courage and I haven't the spirit. I am broken down. I have lost all spirit. Everyone despises me. I feel like a miserable prisoner in this house. I hate life here, and I long to drown myself. I have often, ever so often, thought of killing myself. Why should not I take your offer, since you are good enough and generous enough to say you will save me from this misery and shame?'

He took both her hands in his again and drew her towards him, and, stooping down, kissed her, not on the lips—Melissa noticed that even then—but on the forehead.

'That is well,' he said in his composed, almost chill way. 'You have shown me how to better my own life, Melissa, and I will try to make you happy. I will write to Mr. Aquitaine to-day. He will consent, I am sure.'

'He will consent,' Melissa said, looking shamefacedly down. 'After all that has passed, how could he refuse? If he does refuse, and this is not to be, I will get out of the scrape of living somehow.'

'No need of that,' Montana said encouragingly. 'I will write to Mr. Aquitaine at once. It will all come right.'

'Sometimes I think things never will come right with me again in life, and that the hour would be best for me which brought it all to an end. But, as you are so good and kind to me, I must not think so any more.'

'No,' Montana said; 'you must not have gloomy thoughts any more, Melissa. You will be happy.'

After a while he left her, and went out of the house, looking anything but like a happy lover whose hopes have been crowned by the loved one's promise. His face was even more than usually

melancholy in its expression. But he went out of the house not regretting anything that he had done. He was determined to stand up with something of the character and appearance of a hero in the eyes of Geraldine Rowan. For the present all his thoughts and purposes were centred in that desire. She should not think of him as merely deceitful and selfish. If the career of the comet of a season was to close, it should at least close upon her with something of a blaze of light. Montana was always contemplating himself in some statuesque and heroic attitude. He loved to feed his soul on such contemplation. This time, on the whole, he was well content. He saw himself, as he hoped he must appear to Geraldine Rowan—a self-sacrificing, noble, almost godlike person, stooping from his ethereal height to lift up and cherish some poor flower he had trodden by the way as he passed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN OMINOUS VISITOR.

Montana went home that night in a mood of utter depression. That was strange to him. He had never had, even in his boyhood, the glowing exuberant animal spirits which are like wings to carry some souls over the heaviest troubles, and which are the purest gift of nature, no more to be acquired by effort or culture than the poet's endowment. But he had a consistent strength of will, and a steady faith in himself, which had hitherto always upheld him against adverse conditions and moods of depression. Now, for the first time, his heart seemed to desert him. Even his faith in himself, in his star, was shaken. He was conscious, all too keenly conscious, that he had made some great mistakes; he was sadly beginning to think that he was not the man he had hitherto believed himself to be. Where was that steady inexorable resolve on which he used to pride himself; which he had grown to regard as something godlike? He had allowed himself to fall in love, and he had failed in love. He had set his heart on marrying Geraldine Rowan, and she had rejected and baffled him; and she was going to marry a good-humoured, weak-headed, uninteresting elderly man. It was bad enough, Montana felt, that he should have allowed himself to fall in love; to fall in love like a boy; to do what he had never really done when he was a boy. That was bad enough; but to publish his love and to fail in it; to put himself at a girl's feet and be spurned; to tell her in prophetic, commanding tones that she must marry

him, and to be quietly put aside for some one else; this was indeed humiliation. Why should he ever succeed in anything again, seeing that he had failed in this? Was this only the beginning of a course of failure? Had the tide of his fortunes turned?

Was he growing old? Was this insane passion for a girl who did not care for him only an evidence that he was already sinking into years and into the weak fondnesses of senility? Yet he doubted if old men in their senile love felt such love as he did—a passion compounded of love and hate. He sometimes positively hated Geraldine for the moment, and could have cursed her; and yet the very resolve he had lately taken was taken only in the hope of pleasing her and making her regard him as a hero. He was going to tie himself for life to Melissa Aquitaine for no other purpose whatever than that he might stand well in Geraldine's eyes. For life? How much of life was left that would be worth having? Would life be endurable to him when he began to decay? To go steadily down into years, to lose his personal beauty and his figure, and his stately way of carrying himself, and his power to attract admiration? After all, perhaps, it was better on the whole that he should marry Melissa Aquitaine. It would lead most people not to believe that he had ever thought of marrying Geraldine Rowan and that he had been thrown aside by her. He would not take Melissa with him to America. She could stay with her father for the present; and Montana could forget for a while that he was married, and to the wrong woman.

When he reached his own door, and was taking out his latch-key, he suddenly became aware of a dark figure seated at the threshold. It might have been one of the ordinary belated and houseless wayfarers who hang about every London street, and seek the shelter of any friendly doorway. But Montana drew back for a moment, almost as one who fears a lurking assassin. Recovering himself, however, he approached the doorway, and the figure rose. It was that of a man, and in another moment Montana knew that the man was the old Chartist, Matthew Starr. Starr had been haunting him a good deal lately, and Montana was vexed at seeing him now. He knew the old man was waiting for him, and feared that there would be a scene of some kind.

'So you have come home at last!' Starr said. He looked like a man in a mood to do something desperate. We are bound to admit that what he actually said was, 'So you have come

'ome at last!' and Montana was conscious for the moment of a somewhat ludicrous contrast between his friend's tragic manner and his unlucky perversity of pronunciation.

'So you have come 'ome at last!—I've been waiting for you this long time.'

'Well, my good friend,' Montana answered, 'I have come home at last, and I am ready to speak to you, if you really have anything to say. Will you come in?'

'I don't like to cross your threshold; I'd rather talk to you here.'

The night was bright, the street well lighted by the moon. There were people passing. There were carriages driving up and depositing wearied ladies in evening dress here and there at doorways. Men with light coats over their black dinner-garb were passing along, smoking and talking. The place was not likely to be quiet for an instant.

'I shall not talk to you here,' he said, with that quiet firmness of purpose which he usually found very effective in bearing down opposition. 'If you want to speak to me, Starr, you must come upstairs.'

He opened the door without another word, passed by Starr, and entered the house.

Starr hesitated, and began some remonstrance, and then followed quietly. They passed into Montana's study, and Montana turned up the gas, which was burning low, and pointed Starr to a chair, then quietly sat down himself, took up some letters that were lying on his desk, and began to open them with the air of a man who had no time to waste.

Starr pushed away the chair which was offered to him. 'I'm not going to sit down in your house. I want some satisfaction from you for all the evil you have brought on me. *She* has gone again, and I can't recover her, and I don't want to recover her this time, and it is all along of you.'

'Your daughter—has she gone indeed?' Montana asked in a tone of sympathy which was not all unreal. 'I am sorry to hear it.'

'What's the good of being sorry? I knew she'd go if nothing came of this grand scheme of yours. Nothing is coming of it, and I suppose nothing ever was meant to come of it. I wish you'd have told me long ago. I shouldn't have been depending on you, and I wouldn't have been deluding her with promises that were never to be kept, and perhaps I could have got her to stay with me. Now she's gone, and you're the cause of it, and I must have some satisfaction.'

'My good friend,' Montana said composedly, all his nerve and courage coming back to him as usual at the moment he needed it—'you seem to forget that it was I who found her for you before, and brought her back to you. Perhaps I can do that again.'

'I don't want it done again,' the old man almost screamed. 'No, I don't—I'd rather it wasn't done now. Let her go her own way. Let her go to the devil! She has gone from me, and I give her up. But all the same I feel like one destroyed. I feel like one going mad, and I don't care. But I must have some satisfaction.'

'What do you mean by satisfaction?' Montana asked. 'If you don't want to take the girl back, what can I do for you? It is no fault of mine if your daughter is foolish and impatient. Let me tell you she has a very foolish and impatient father. Do you think a great plan like mine can be hurried up to suit every foolish man who wants everything to come to him just at the right moment? There are other interests more important than yours or any single man's involved in this great enterprise. It cannot be moved on to please you, or me, or anyone else. It must take its time.'

'Take its time!' Starr contemptuously said. 'Take its time! aye, and it has been taking its time, sure enough, and you have been taking your time, and what have you been doing? Nothing for that end, I know. You have been passing your time in fine houses with grand people—in your Belgravias and your Mayfairs, with your countesses and your duchesses; and poor people you have deluded may starve or drown for all you care. You are a humbug and an impostor, and I'll show you up—see if I don't. I'll have my revenge on you. I feel as if I could kill you. I am in the humour to kill you now, and myself afterwards, and I don't know but what I had better do it.'

His eyes really flashed like those of a madman. Montana saw that there was danger in him. A single mistake now, a word spoken at the wrong time, a change of colour on his part, might drive Starr on to some desperate act. But Montana sat composedly in his chair and showed no sign of emotion.

'I am sorry for you, Starr, I am sorry for your daughter, and I am sorry that you should even at such a moment be so unjust and ungrateful.'

'Ungrateful!' Starr exclaimed; 'well, I do like that! Ungrateful to you, for humbugging me and deceiving me all this time, and sending my daughter back upon the streets! It would

be an act of charity to rid the world of you, for you will do more harm yet if you are allowed to live, and I think I am sent to kill you.'

He made a rapid clutch at one of his pockets, and drew out a knife in a sheath, such as he used to carry for the purposes of his craft when he worked harder than he had been doing these late distracted and unhappy days.

'Look here,' he said, 'I've got a knife, and I'm not sure that I shan't drive it through your heart first and mine after.'

'Put back your knife, you foolish old man,' Montana said pityingly. 'I am sorry to see you make such a ridiculous exhibition of yourself. Do you think you can alarm me with nonsensical bravado of that kind? I have lived long enough in places where a man learns to look after his own life, and has to face, every hour, twenty times more danger than a poor old man with a knife. Why, look, your hand is trembling. What do you think could happen to me from you? Look behind you.'

The old man started and looked round, evidently expecting to see some one behind him. That was quite enough for Montana. It gave him all the time he wanted. He seized Starr's wrist with a grip very much too strong for the excited and half-starved old Chartist. Even in his youngest days Starr would not have been strong enough for Montana. Now his leader was able to disarm him as easily as a nurse can take some dangerous plaything from the hands of a naughty child.

'You must be quiet, Starr,' Montana said, coolly throwing the knife into his desk, and locking the desk upon it. 'If we are to talk this thing out, it must be like rational beings, and not like two ridiculous actors on the stage of the Victoria Theatre. I thought you had too much respect for yourself to play the part of a mountebank.'

A sudden reaction came over the broken old man. He looked piteously at Montana, and then sat down and hid his face in his hands and began to whine. He was trembling all over. An ordinary observer might have said that he was in an advanced stage of *delirium tremens*. An ordinary London policeman would have been for locking him up forthwith as drunk and disorderly. Montana knew Starr too well to have any suspicion of the kind; and he understood the nature of man's emotions too well to confound the phenomena of hysterical passion with the phenomena of intoxication. He allowed Starr to cry and sob for a while in his childish, shivering way, uninterrupted, and then went kindly over to him and put his hand on his shoulder.

'Come, come, my good friend Starr; you must not give way like this any more. You are not the man to sink down in such a way. You have friends who will do all they can for you and for your poor daughter; I am one of them. We'll have her back with us yet.'

'Never, never,' Starr said energetically, looking up and rousing himself with the words; 'I'll never see her or speak to her any more. I'm going now.'

'No, stay; let us talk this all over. Don't go just yet.'

'Look ye here, Mr. Montana,' Starr cried out—screamed out, a new burst of passion overmastering him; 'I tell you, if you have any sense, you'll have me locked up. Do have me locked up; it's better for you. You've got off this time, and I've got off; but I shall do something terrible yet; I know I shall. I shan't be able to prevent myself from doing it. I believe I am sent to do it. Have me locked up; it's your last chance, I tell you!'

But he did not give Montana this last chance, even if Montana had been likely to avail himself of it. He suddenly sprang up and darted out of the room. Montana heard him opening the street door and slamming it behind him. Looking out of the window, Montana saw his distraught follower running down the street like some hunted beast. Perhaps it would have been well if he could have taken Starr's advice and had the crazy old man locked up. But it was too late now to think of that. Montana brooded long over what had happened. He was as little liable to physical fear or nervousness as any man, and yet the menaces of Starr disquieted him. It was a *schauderhaft* sort of sensation to know that this mad old fanatic, vowing some terrible deed against him, was at large, and perhaps in the very same street. Montana wakened up more than once that night, and fancied he heard the stealthy, creeping tread of some one in the room—some one crawling up to his bedside to murder him. What danger ever tries the nerves of a threatened man like that of the private assassin?—and in this case the possible assassin was a half-crazy fanatic, whom neither fear, nor menace, nor persuasion, nor concession, nor bribe could move from his purpose. Montana was, at one moment of weakness, on the point of waking up his servant-man and bidding him sleep in the same room with him. But he soon cast this thought out of his head, and made up his mind that any risk would be better than such an open confession of fear.

He had to brace up his nerves next day when going out of

the house, in order to prevent himself from looking eagerly up and down the street to see whether anyone was waiting for him and watching him. He felt chilly, even in the sunlight. He found his heart beating quick at any sudden noise close to him —even the familiar rattle of a hansom cab, or the driver's discordant shriek of warning. These were new sensations to Montana. Perhaps they came in part from the condition of mind into which he had been dropped by his recent bitter disappointment. Anyhow, he felt that the time between this and his departure for America could not be too short for him.

There could be no doubt that Matthew Starr had lately been doing a great deal to spread a distrust of Montana and his scheme amongst people of his own class, and especially amongst the devotees of the Church of Free Souls. The wild energy with which the old Chartist declared his own utter want of faith in Montana any more had something electric in it. It brought conviction to men of his own class and of his order of mind. It is true that his story, when he told it, had no logical force as a condemnation of Montana. Montana had evidently done all he could for the man, had rescued his daughter once, and was anxious to rescue her again. Still, what Starr said did impress men and women of his own like, worn down with hard work and suffering, and for a time filled with a sudden wild hope—it did impress them much when this man, who had had such belief in Montana's scheme, and had built his hopes and staked his life and his daughter's life upon it, now went round declaring that there was no such scheme, that there was nothing in Montana, that he was an impostor, and that they had all been led astray and deceived by him. In any case, Montana had been too long in London without giving clear evidence that he had some practical scheme in hand not to encourage a feeling of doubt. He had not lately been to the Church of Free Souls as often as his admirers and worshippers down there could have desired, and Starr had sent the word out amongst all his own class that Montana passed his time in the West End, and was to be seen perpetually with duchesses and countesses. The duchesses and countesses, if they had come to be tested by critical examination, would have dwindled down to Lady Vanessa Barnes, because although Montana did sometimes visit at the houses of great ladies, it was by no means easy to get him there. He was the pursued, and not the pursuer, so far as rank and fashion were concerned; and Lady Vanessa Barnes was the only woman of rank with whom he was often seen. But there is nothing, perhaps,

in life so sensitive, so easily roused, as the jealousy of the very poor concerning one of their leaders who is supposed to be drawing away from their side in order to keep well with the great and the high-born. The train that Starr had wildly laid took fire somehow, and with a certain blaze and explosion, in that physical and intellectual region out of which most of the humblest worshippers in the Church of Free Souls were drawn.

CHAPTER XXX.

DANGER SIGNALS.

Frank Trescoe and young Fanshawe were approaching London in a train from the North. They had been travelling through the night, and trying to sleep, and waking up and taking an interlude of smoke, and exchanging a word or two now and then in an undertone. They had had little talk on the way, however, for the smoking-carriage had other passengers, and it was not until morning that these others were dropped successively at stations on the way, and Trescoe and Fanshawe were left alone. Then they struggled up into wakefulness, and began with half-dazed eyes to look out on the quiet fields and the soft sunshine.

Soon they resumed a conversation on a subject which had lately occupied them a good deal. Their conversation was about Montana. They had not been very successful in their inquiries concerning him. They had got what might be called fair historical evidence to show that Montana was the son of Varlowe, the livery-stable keeper. If a man were writing Montana's biography, years after Montana's death, he might be well justified in describing him on the strength of that evidence as Varlowe's son, the man who had married pretty Miss Fanshawe. But there was no evidence to bring into a court of law or to confute denial or to overwhelm a defendant's case.

Moreover, Fanshawe, at least, was beginning to take new thought on the matter.

'That's my ultimatum, Trescoe,' he said. 'I don't care what becomes of the whole affair any more. I'll have no further hand or part in it. Let him be who he will, I'll do nothing to injure him. He is going to marry Aquitaine's daughter. He has behaved well to her, and for her sake and for Aquitaine's I will have nothing more to do with this business.'

'Then,' Trescoe said, angrily, 'you really mean to say you will let this man go on, even though he is an impostor? You

will let him go on swindling you don't know how many thousands of people, and you will do nothing to expose him, just because he is marrying Aquitaine's daughter?'

'Quite so; I'll have nothing to do with it. You see, I was willing enough to make some sacrifice in my own person and my own family for the sake of having the man shown up in his true colours, whatever they are. If he had turned out to be what we thought he was, he would have turned out to be the husband of my sister, and I should not particularly delight in such a disclosure as that. But I didn't mind that. I was willing to stand all that. That belongs to the past. Nothing can harm her, and I don't mind what talk might be brought up about her family. But it is different in the case of this poor little girl, Melissa Aquitaine. She was a fool. She was ridiculously in love with this man; but I suppose we mustn't wonder at that.'

Trescoe looked darkly at him, as if he thought Fanshawe's words had a double meaning in them. But Fanshawe went on unheeding. 'Anyhow, he has acted very well in the affair, and she is going to be Mrs. Montana, and I believe she is off her head with delight, and of course Aquitaine thinks it the best thing that can possibly happen now, although he does not like Montana himself any more than you or I, and I'll not do anything that might spoil that little girl's happiness. No, not if I know it. If I can't make anybody happy, I'll not try to make anybody unhappy.'

'How do you know,' Trescoe argued, 'what mischief he may have done already? You see how he attracts women and all that; you can't tell what harm he may do yet. He ought to be stopped. He ought to be shown up. He ought to be shamed or punished somehow.'

'Well, I don't know about that,' Fanshawe said, with a half smile. 'I fancy, if the women were foolish about him, the men were not much better. We all took up with him a great deal too readily and too much, and we let him come too near our women, I suspect, and we might have seen that such an awfully handsome fellow could not, even if he tried, have kept them from falling in love with him. Anyhow, Trescoe, take my word, the less said about the whole business now the better. What's done is done and can't be helped, and it is my confident belief that his marrying Melissa Aquitaine is about the best thing that can happen for a good many of us. There will be quiet in other families as well as in Melissa's when that job's done.'

'That's not my way of looking at things,' Trescoe said, 'and I see my way pretty well in this matter. I am going to follow this out to the bitter end. I'll never let that man go until I have exposed him, and pulled him down from his confounded pedestal, and let the world know who he is and what he is.'

'What's the use? You can't do it. You haven't got any proofs against him. You will get some people to say that he looks like the man who married my sister, and then a lot of others will say they don't see any resemblance, and the man himself will talk plausibly to his own followers. He has convinced them already. They will believe anything he says.'

'No, it's not so; you are wrong, Fanshawe. I have been looking into it. I find there are a good lot of people who are not inclined to believe in him any more than you and I. I can show them he is an impostor, and I am going to do it.'

'What are you going to do?'

'Well, I will do this for one thing. He is going to have a great farewell meeting, or reception, or something down at that confounded hole of his in the East End, somewhere in the Minories or Petticoat Lane.'

'You know where the place is, well enough,' Fanshawe interposed, 'so do I. We have all been there. It isn't in Petticoat Lane, and it wouldn't alter the condition of things very materially even if it were. Let's hear what you are going to do there.'

'When his meeting is full,' said Trescoe, 'I will get up and denounce him in the face of the whole crowd. I will tell them who he is; I will defy him to deny my statement, and I will dethrone him then and there.'

'Stuff!' was Fanshawe's comment. 'He will tell them that what you say is not true. He will put on an appearance of offended dignity and injured innocence, and they won't care twopence for what you say or what you do; and you will be ejected neck and crop, or very likely you will be torn in pieces.'

'I don't think so,' Trescoe said grimly. 'I'll take care to have a few fellows to stand by me.'

'Oh, I'll come and stand by you, for the matter of that. If you are going to be ejected or torn in pieces, I'll be in the row. But I don't suppose that anything more will come of that than that I shall get a share of what is meant for you, and we shall both come out of it equally badly.'

'I'll run the risk, anyhow,' Trescoe declared, with set teeth. 'I will have this thing out. I look forward with delight to the idea of exposing him in the face of his own friends. It is the

only satisfaction I have had for months back. I hate the man, and I'll have it out with him. Some of his fine friends, I dare say, will be there: his patrons and patronesses from the West End; this Lady—what's her name—some duchess's daughter who has taken it into her head to patronise him; he's always tied to her petticoat-tail. I will expose him before her very eyes. Yes, I will make her laugh at him. There will be some satisfaction in that.'

'Make her laugh at you, very likely, I dare say,' Fanshawe said, 'when she sees you being personally conducted out of the place by the horny hands of honest labour, with, it may be, an occasional impulse from honest labour's still more horny foot.'

'This whole affair seems very trivial to you, Fanshawe, although I should think you might have some feeling against the man who married your sister and treated her badly.'

'But come now, look here,' Fanshawe said. 'First of all, it is not certain that this is the man who married my sister; and next, it is certain that if he did marry her, he did not treat her badly. Our people did not like him because the fellow was a low fellow—son of a livery-stable keeper—and we thought we were bound to be tremendous people at that time—why, I don't know. Anyhow, they didn't like his marrying her, and they sulked about it, and they treated her badly. They may say what they like, but I never heard that he treated her badly, and I don't believe it. Anyhow, I have no personal feeling against the man. I think if this man is deceiving people he ought to be exposed, if we can do it; but I don't see my way to it; and now that he is going to marry little Melissa Aquitaine, I am rather glad that I don't see my way. I am very sorry for any of my dear brother and sister fellow-mortals in general who may be taken in by Montana; but really they must be left to open their eyes for themselves. I am a deal more concerned for Melissa Aquitaine. She is more to me than a couple of hundred or thousand swart mechanics from the East End, about whom I know nothing. I don't believe he is a swindler, mind you, or anything of the kind in the ordinary sense; but if he contrives to impose on them, it is their own affair; I can't help it; but I should be very sorry to distress Aquitaine and Aquitaine's daughter.'

Trescoe gave a growl of contempt or disapproval, and dropped out of the conversation.

'What a changed fellow you are, Frank Trescoe!' Fanshawe could not help saying. 'I never saw a man pass through such a change in the same period of time. You have become a

regular savage. You hate Montana with the hatred of a red Indian in a penny romance.'

The train ran into the London station, and there was an end to the conversation for the moment. As the two young men were looking after their luggage, a man passed them, hurrying on his way to a train soon about to start for the North.

Trescoe saluted him in a gruff sort of a way.

'Who is that man?' Fanshawe asked, looking after him. 'I know him, surely.'

'I should think you did. It's young Hope, the man who passed as the son of Varlowe, the old livery-stable keeper. The young fellow was in love with Melissa Aquitaine; don't you remember?'

'Is that he? I should never have thought so. He seems greatly changed, doesn't he?'

'Did not notice, I'm sure,' Trescoe said. 'How changed?'

'Well, he looked rather a raw sort of boy the other day, as well as I remember. He seems changed into a man all at once. Looks as if he meant something. I thought he was a spoony sort of boy—handsome enough, but nothing in him. He looks as if he had something in him now.'

'Men often change quickly in that sort of way,' said Trescoe gloomily. 'Under the influence of some strong feeling, you can't tell how things may change a man, or how soon.'

Fanshawe looked at him inquiringly. There was certainly, as he had lately been saying, a great change in Trescoe.

'Yes, I suppose so,' Fanshawe said, feeling now indeed well convinced on the subject.

'Anyhow, I have heard so,' Trescoe continued grimly; 'read of such things in romances, perhaps. They may be in real life.'

It was Clement Hope whom they had passed, and undoubtedly his appearance as well as his ways of life had undergone a change. He had ceased to look the sentimental, half-poetic, idle sort of boy that people knew him for only a few weeks before. He had really grown into a man, with a man's bearing and resolve. He was now hurrying off to one of the northern seaports, full of energy and busy with the purpose he had lately taken up. He had been kept moving a good deal of late, up and down London, round London, up and down to places far from London. If he looked earnest and serious, it was not because life wore a melancholy aspect for him, or because his purpose was too much with him, or because anything was going wrong with him. His great trouble of old days had been that he had nothing to do

or to strive for; and he was unconsciously withering in an enforced inactivity, believed by many to be an idler, when he was only pining to be a worker. After the first keen grief for Mr. Varlowe's death had passed away, there followed some busy, happy days for Clement. Never before had there been, even for him, days like those days. It is possible that the fullest success of after life, in love, in ambition, in reputation, might fail to give him back the keen, exquisite joy of that brief holiday time. He was in the heart of the veriest fool's paradise. He had contrived to thoroughly misunderstand every word of kindness and sympathy spoken by Geraldine Rowan to him and of him and his enterprise. He was wildly in love with her, and he had convinced himself that she would not be unwilling, some time or other, to hear him tell her as much. Geraldine was innocently making a sad mistake. Believing that there was no longer any reason why she might not be as friendly with the young man as she wished to be, she had not stopped to think whether Clement knew of this. It had never occurred to her that he might misunderstand her. She spoke and acted in the most perfect good faith and simplicity, glad of her promise to Captain Marion, if for no other reason, because it gave her leave to be frank and sympathetic and friendly with Clement Hope. There is something to be said in her excuse, if such good feeling as hers needs to be excused even in its mistakes. She still believed Clement to be under the influence of an enduring passion for Melissa. Not only would it have seemed to her impossible that Clement could be thinking of any other woman, but the question had never for one moment arisen in her mind. She pictured herself as a sincere and attached friend to Clement Hope, whom a new condition of things, not otherwise very delightful in itself, permitted to acknowledge her friendship without concealment or reserve. Nor did it ever occur to her to think that there might be any danger to her own feelings and her own happiness in their unreserved intercourse. Say what people will about the fitful and ungovernable ways of nature in men and women, it is certain that there are some men and women with whom the sense of duty and of right, consciously or unconsciously, moulds and governs every feeling. There are men and women who, from the moment when they accept a certain course as the right one, lose all inclination for any path but that. When once Geraldine Rowan had given her promise to Captain Marion, any thought of allowing herself to fall in love with anybody, or allowing anyone to

fall in love with her, was out of the question. Most of us are weak enough to feed our impulses, our disappointments, and our sentimentalism, even though we had rather they were not living and active. But there are single-minded natures to be found here and there with whom such a contradiction is impossible, and Geraldine Rowan's was one of these. So they went on, Clement and she, and he dreamed of love and she only thought of friendship and sympathy. He consulted her about everything, saw her many times some days, never missed a day of seeing her when he was in town. He was as busy as he was happy. He had thrown himself into his new enterprise with an overwhelming energy. He was always going from one end of the town to the other, or from London to some seaport, consulting artisans, tradesmen, peasants, shipbrokers, shipowners, all manner of persons whose advice could be of the least assistance to him in the gathering together of his new colony. He had settled in his own mind that until he was able to start upon his enterprise, and to show himself capable of bringing it to a reality, he would not speak out to Geraldine Rowan the feeling that was in his heart. But he was glad to believe that she must already have seen something of this in him, and he hoped that when his full revelation came to be made it would not be much of a surprise to her, but would perhaps be a welcome announcement. Everything seemed particularly beautiful to him just then. There was a daily beauty in the commonest details of his life. He took the deepest interest in the fortunes of every withered old artisan in the East End whom he endeavoured to induce to join in his enterprise, and to bring with him his wife and his children, out of sickly seething London into bright new air and wholesome free life. Every feeling of sympathy and of kindness that he had in his nature was quickened into warmer and more exquisite life by his love for Geraldine. Nothing seemed mean, or ignoble, or melancholy, or unworthy of care, while that affection filled his heart. It gave him a tender feeling to every man and woman he saw. The dullest streets of the East End, the most noisy, pitch-smelling, bilge-reeking quays of some of the seaports he visited, had for him the sparkle of an eternal sunlight on them. He had attained to a rare condition in human affairs. He was not merely happy. That, after all, is common enough, even in this world 'bursting with sin and sorrow.' Everyone has his season of happiness now and then. But Clement's season was unlike that of most others. He knew he was happy, knew it at the time, felt it to

the full, and enjoyed it with all his soul. To most of us happiness is like a painting. We must remove to some distance from it in order to appreciate it. Clement was more fortunate now. In the midst of his happiness he knew that he was happy. He was soon to be undeceived, soon to be flung rudely out of his delicious fool's paradise. Marion would have undeceived him before this, out of pure kindness and pity, but that Marion, like most others, still believed him languishing in hopeless love for Melissa Aquitaine. Only Marion and Geraldine and Montana knew as yet of Geraldine's engagement; and Clement never saw Montana now.

During these days it happened that Clement came into companionship now and then with old Matthew Starr. Clement had known him before, through Montana, and was surprised to find, on meeting him lately, that the old man's feelings towards his leader had undergone so great a change. Clement was far too just and kindly-hearted not to argue with Starr, and endeavour to make him see that he was wrong in the charges he made against Montana, and that Montana had done all he could do for him. He tried to show the unfairness of Starr's assuming that Montana's scheme was never to be accomplished. But as to this part of the business, Clement himself felt doubts growing up within him which he could hardly account for. The change in his own feelings with regard to Montana seemed to have no real ground of justification; and yet it was there, a solid fact, affecting all his thoughts and memories of his late leader and idol. Clement did his best to indûce old Starr to join him in his enterprise, as Starr would have nothing to do any more with anything carried on by Montana, even supposing Montana's scheme were to prove a reality. But on that point Starr was fixed. He would not go anywhere, he said; he would try no more schemes, no, not he; he had done with all of them. He had dragged his miserable life out in London so far, and in London now he would wait until he died. He did not want any better life, he said. The worst there was would be good enough for him. He always added, 'Maybe it won't be long. Maybe it won't be long.'

Sometimes his manner was so strange, his eyes looked so wildly, his mutterings and frowns were so like those of one who does not know what he is saying or doing, that Clement began to fear the poor old man must be taking to drink. Starr had always been a rigid advocate of total abstinence, a fanatic of temperance as of all other virtues; it would be a change indeed

if he were now falling into the drunkard's ways. Yet his misery was so great that any, even momentary, relief from it might be too strong a temptation for him. Drunkenness has been not inaptly described as the search for the ideal. But Clement always put away the suspicion about Starr; for the strange mood did not last with the poor old man. It often passed away in a moment, and left him clearly sane and sober.

One evening Clement returned to London after an absence of two or three days. When he reached his lonely home he found a heap of letters awaiting him. He turned them over after the fashion of most men, looking at the addresses of various, and wondering from whom they came, before taking the bold step of opening each envelope and making certain. Most of them seemed uninteresting. One, however, attracted him, because he knew the handwriting to be that of Matthew Starr, and he knew that Matthew Starr found it no easy matter to write a letter, and was not likely to write without some purpose.

This was what the letter contained:

'Respected Sir,—If you should have it in your mind to go to the Church of Free Souls to-morrow, take the advice of a friend, and don't go. Don't go yourself, and if there are any very near and dear to you who intend to go, take the advice of a friend and get them to stay away. The judgment of the Lord is often executed in strange ways and by odd instruments, and to-morrow the judgment of the Lord will overtake some who have deserved it. This is written by one who has a good right to know, for he has had it borne in upon him that he is the instrument of the heavenly judgment. The innocent must suffer with the guilty. Such is the will of Heaven. But it is not necessary that all the innocent should suffer, and that some should not escape, and I should like some of those to get off unharmed that had no share in doing harm themselves. A word to the wise.

'Yours,

'From a Well-wisher.

'P.S.—Do not throw this aside and say it is a hoax. It is not. It is God's truth. If you will go after this, you and yours, then what follows be on your own heads. I have washed my hands clean.'

The letter was dated the day before. It was not signed, and yet Clement felt perfectly certain it was from Starr. This very night the meeting was to take place at the Church of Free Souls. Clement had had a vague intention of going there if he should

be in town, but he had not particularly made up his mind on the matter. Now, however, he determined to hasten there at once. He looked at his watch. There was not much time left, and the distance between his house and the East End was great. If any danger was there, it was possible that some help could be given, and he resolved to be in the thing, at all events. He did not attach too much importance to the letter, and yet there was always something about Starr, of late, which would have made thoughtful persons unwilling to disregard his words or his threats. It would be quite too late to attempt to get to Marion's and show him the letter. If Marion and his companions were going to the meeting at all, they would have left home before Clement could get there. No; there was no time for anything but to go as fast as wheels could carry him to the Church of Free Souls. At the very best, he could only be in the place just before the business of the evening was likely to begin.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ORDEAL BY FIRE.

THERE was a crowd round the door of the Church of Free Souls as Clement drove up. His mind was much relieved when he saw that the door was still open. It was the rule there to close the door the moment the hall was thoroughly filled, so that no one by coming in or going out should disturb the proceedings of a meeting. As he drove across Tower Hill, he saw that there were some carriages drawn up there; and he knew that Lady Vanessa Barnes' was one of them. It was usual when there was a meeting at the Church of Free Souls for those who had carriages to leave them standing on Tower Hill until the business was over. Clement could not help observing that there were fewer carriages just now than were commonly to be seen in the height of the season and the zenith of Montana's fame.

Eight chimed from a clock in a neighbouring steeple as Clement reached the Church of Free Souls. Eight was the hour of the meeting; a moment more, and the door would have been closed against him. Even as it was, Clement had some trouble forcing his way through a crowd, every one of whom was bent on forcing his own way in before it became too late. Clement was fortunately known to many of the crowd, and they made way for him, regarding him as one who had a sort of prior claim to admission. He had hardly got in when he heard the door close behind him. He made his way into the great hall. It

was crowded to overflowing; but Montana had not yet made his appearance.

Something was evidently in the air. Clement could see that at a glance. There was an uneasy look about many of the congregation in that temple which forbode disturbance. Some men looked hard and eager and passionate; others were timid, and kept casting expectant alarmed glances here and there. Nobody seemed to know what was coming, or why there should be dread, but the dread was there. The meeting seemed charged with some electric force which promised explosion. The crowd was gathered together to hear a farewell address from Montana, and bid him God-speed on his voyage across the Atlantic, after which he was to return with plans and details all complete, and to take out his shiploads of pilgrims to the bright new world, the golden free colony whose first sod would have been turned by that time. It ought to have been an occasion for pure good-humour and fraternity and kindness and friendly regret, brightened by hope and fair prospect. Yet the whisper had gone about somehow that the meeting was not to be entirely friendly, and that those who were weakly of nerve had better stay away. Naturally, those who liked excitement were all the more eager to find themselves present. Some whisper had reached even the stately heights on which Lady Vanessa Barnes was enthroned, and she ventured to ask Montana about it, and to beg of him as a special favour to see that a place was found for her. Montana had smiled his usual cold smile, and said he feared she would be disappointed if she expected any kind of disturbance; but he was willing to gratify her all the same, and promised that a place should be found for her if she persevered in her wish. She did persevere, and now was one of the crowd—attended, of course, by her devoted husband. Captain Marion was there with Geraldine and Melissa Aquitaine. Melissa was looking up with longing eager eyes to the door from which Montana was to come out when he had to address the audience. She knew it well. She had seen him come out there once before, on that memorable day when the foolish old man, the father of that silly Clement Hope, got up and made a row. How god-like Montana appeared to her then, and how god-like he appeared to her now! Yet, her feelings were not all of pride and joy. They were dashed with a deep sense of mortification. It seemed as if the god were not lifting her up to his height, but only stooping from his pedestal and humbling himself in order to get down to her, out of mere pity for her. As Clement Hope came

in, he was recognised by many as the organiser of another scheme having the same purpose as Montana's, and he received a cordial cheer. The cheer was taken up when he was recognised by a little cluster of men who may be roughly described as belonging to the same intellectual and political sect as Mr. Starr, who had got it into their minds that Clement was the sincere and true-hearted rival of Montana, and was therefore to be acclaimed with special energy. These men applauded Clement as if he had been a conquering hero; and those who scarcely knew who Clement was, and some who had not the least idea of who he was, took up the applause and repeated it, assuming it to be the right sort of thing to do. Clement, too anxious to be confused even by unexpected popular applause, was only eager to find Montana. He knew where to find him, and soon became lost to public view.

'He is a fine young fellow,' Marion remarked to Geraldine. 'He looks like a young hero, I can't help thinking.'

'I think he is a young hero,' Geraldine said.

'Yes; I begin to believe there is something in him.'

'I always thought there was something in him. The very first day I saw him, he gave me the idea of a young hero who only wanted something heroic to do.'

'A hero not yet in employment,' Marion said with a smile.

'Something like that,' said Geraldine, but she did not smile. 'I hope he has found his path now. I think he has. I know he will do great good yet.'

'But surely Montana's scheme is something much grander than anything Clement Hope can start,' Marion whispered.

'The sunset clouds look a great deal grander than the hills,' Geraldine replied; 'but you can't live on the sunset clouds, and you can on the hills.'

'You never liked Montana,' Marion said, shaking his head.

'I never liked him.' Geraldine was inclined to add: 'You have no reason to complain of that.'

Marion's remark was significant. A man deeply in love with a girl would hardly, even for a moment, have thought of finding fault with her because she had not a high opinion of one who sought to be his rival.

'He does not care much about me,' Geraldine thought, 'and I am very glad of it.'

Meanwhile Clement had found his way into the room behind the platform, where he knew Montana would remain withdrawn from public observation until the moment came for him to make his speech.

Montana was sitting in an old arm-chair, his elbow leaning upon a little table, and his hand supporting his forehead. His eyes were cast down, and he was evidently in deep and not pleasant thought. Clement had not seen him for some weeks, and it seemed to the young man that a remarkable change had come over Montana. Whether it was the dusk of the evening hour, or the dimness of the room with its cloudy old window-panes barred outside, or whether there was a real change in the man himself, it certainly seemed to Clement as if Montana looked much older than before. For all the beauty of outline that face had, and the marble clearness of the complexion, it still showed to Clement like the face of an ageing man, of one who had left the last verge of youth long behind him.

Montana looked up, and, seeing Clement, smiled that welcoming smile which at one time had such captivation for Clement, as for most other people. Yet even in this Clement seemed to see a change. There appeared to be something unreal in it now, almost mechanical, like a ballet-dancer's soulless grimace. The change, to be sure, may have been more in Clement's own feelings than in Montana's looks; but, subjective or objective, the change was there for Clement.

In a few breathless words Clement told Montana what he had to tell, and thrust the anonymous letter into his hand, only adding that it was the writing of Matthew Starr. Montana knew this for himself. He was familiar with Matthew Starr's handwriting, and he was not surprised at the threat it contained, although he could not understand the nature of the threat, or the danger which was supposed to be around them.

'I should think the old man means something,' he said quietly. 'He made an attempt to kill me once—did I tell you?—a few nights ago. No; I have not seen you of late. He did. I should think he means something—some attempt, perhaps, to destroy this place.'

Clement suggested possibly dynamite.

Montana smiled a cold smile. No, he said, he thought Starr was hardly up to the level of dynamite; something less scientific—a can of powder, or something of that kind, would more likely be his form. 'I shall have to go on almost at once,' Montana said, 'and, as you know, the doors are always closed when we begin. You must get quietly round and see that they are opened first of all, without making the least disturbance. Tell no one about this. There must be no alarm. If we find that anything is wrong, there will be time enough. It may all come

to nothing, and any sort of panic would be worse than the old man's attempt, whatever it may be. There are only three or four rooms altogether, and it can't take long to find if anything is amiss. See if old Starr is in the meeting. I will make some search here—I have a moment or two yet before going on.'

Clement went quietly round and himself withdrew noiselessly the bolts of the central door and opened its lock. So much, at least, was secure. He looked into the hall itself, and his keen eyes in a moment saw every face there; but Starr certainly was not one of the audience. Then he went back to Montana.

'There is nothing to trouble us in this room,' said Montana, 'nor in the little room opening out of it. The walls of this house and of all the houses round are of enormous and old-fashioned thickness. It is not likely our friend Starr would think of getting at us by setting fire to any of our neighbours. If there is anything, it is somewhere here. There is nothing above the hall itself but the roof. The only other place is the room above our heads, up those stairs. I would go up there, but I have not time. I must go on. It won't take you two moments to make a search there—and when you have made it, just come on to the platform and say one word to me. Then I shall know how to act. Very likely it is a false alarm—the threat of a madman, not of an assassin.'

Montana passed out through the door and on to his platform. Clement could hear a thunder of applause, and could detect, too, a low and ominous murmur of disaffection.

Clement crept his way up the creaking stairs. They were scarcely lighted by one window, the dull and blotted glass of which was further darkened by heavy iron bars outside. He reached a broad lobby, now thickly carpeted with dust and rubbish of all kinds. Before him was a great solid old-fashioned oaken door. Clement tried the door, but it was evidently made fast inside. He shook it once or twice, and found that it was barred as well as locked. Suddenly he heard a crackling as of fire beginning to burn up within, and he felt certain that he could also hear movements inside, as of some human being or animal stirring about. He called through the keyhole, 'Is anyone inside?' He called this again and again, and shook the door furiously with all his strength. He might as well have shaken at the base of the old Tower outside. He was sure he heard something like an exultant chuckle from within. A sudden idea flashed into his mind.

'Are you there, Starr?' he cried.

An answer came back, 'The judgment of the Lord is here.' It was in Starr's voice, at once hoarse and shrill. 'Go away; don't disturb me; I am doing the Lord's work.'

'Starr, listen to me, for God's sake!'

'I ain't Starr any more,' the voice answered. 'I am the judgment of the Lord. Get ye away, and let the judgment of the Lord destroy the deceivers and the wicked.'

It afterwards appeared that this upper chamber was used as an old lumber-room, into which successive occupants of the Church of Free Souls, through its various stages of change, had flung all useless things which they found immediately in their way. There were old theatrical wrecks, torn scenery, and wooden properties dating from the music-hall days; there were pots of paint and cans of oil; and there were old barrels that once held pitch, now broken up into heaps of staves; there were smashed chairs, and forms, and trestles, and mops and brooms, and pails and buckets, and fragments of carpet and sheeting, vast quantities of sawdust, and, in short, a whole magazine of inflammable material ready for the first incendiary who chose to apply a match.

In his days of sanity Starr undoubtedly had become acquainted with the existence of this place, and when the mad fit was on him he remembered it only too well. No explanation was ever had from him, or from anybody else, as to how he had got there, and what he had done when he did get there. These were secrets never to be discovered. But people had little trouble in coming to the conclusion that he had purposely hidden himself until the meeting began; locked and barred the door, so that no one could interfere between him and his desperate purpose; piled up a mass of material for fire, and set it blazing, and waited for the end.

Meanwhile the crackling grew faster and faster, as if fresh fuel were being poured on the fire, and already Clement could see a red light through the keyhole, and smoke began to come forth. He shook the door once wildly again with a final and futile effort of strength, and then with a cry of anger and despair he scrambled down the stairs. He stopped for a moment in the room below, that he might collect himself and present a composed appearance when he entered the hall of the meeting. He knew well that the least alarm would send a commotion through the room which could hardly end without destruction to life. Quietly, therefore—as quietly as if he were entering an ordinary theatre—he passed into the hall through the door by which Montana had reached the platform, and he came just behind Montana.

Right opposite Montana sat Frank Trescoe in front. He was waiting with stern cruel patience, until Montana should finish his speech, to rise and denounce him as an impostor. He had brought men with him to stand by him. But he never got the chance to try his interruption. Starr had anticipated him. Trescoe's eyes flashed as he saw Clement step on to the platform. Had he come to warn Montana? 'Confound him! How dares he to interfere? Shall I begin at once—now?'

Clement whispered half-a-dozen words to Montana.

The moment was one of intense anxiety. Montana had not an instant to decide.

'You are quite sure of this?' he said in a quiet whisper, without even looking back.

'Quite sure,' Clement said. 'Nothing can stop the fire. We can't get at it—the old madman has taken good care of that.'

'Go to your people,' Montana said; 'tell them to keep perfectly quiet, and to do whatever I say.'

Not an instant passed in this breathless conversation. Montana then came forward to the front of the platform, and, speaking in tones as composed as if he were merely announcing the object of the next meeting in that hall, he said, 'I have to request all of you to do exactly as I bid you. Let the women all leave the hall first—all but one who will stay with me to the last. Let the men then go. Let this be done with perfect quietness, those who are nearest to the door going first, and the rest after. Let there be no rushing and no alarm. All your lives depend upon it. The house is on fire, and the flames cannot be put out. But there is time enough yet—full ten minutes. I will stay to the last.'

His terrible composure over-mastered the crowd. Had he announced at once that the house was on fire, it would have been impossible to keep any order. But his slow, deliberate, ice-cold words, preparing them for some serious announcement, wrought them into a mood of obedience and of self-control. Even while Montana was yet speaking some of the women were moving quietly to the door. Had the excitement of panic broken out in that hall, with its one mode of exit, it is questionable whether a dozen of the crowd would have escaped with life. Not the flames, but the panic, would have killed them—the panic which would have set them rushing and trampling over each other, and maddened strong men to crush down women and children in the selfish frenzy of terror. Now, under the sudden and strong influence of Montana's demeanour and his words, the crowd began to melt away in hushed and orderly submission. They

seemed subdued and cowed, not by the presence of danger, but by the sense of discipline.

Meanwhile the cracking of timbers and the falling of planks was already heard, and the smoke began to pour in, and here and there one saw through some cranny in the walls the light of a flame leaping up behind.

'Come here, Melissa,' Montana said, beckoning to the girl. 'Come up here, and stay with me.'

Melissa gave a little cry of delight, ran from her place and sprang up the platform stairs, and stood beside him. He held out his hand to her, and the girl clasped it.

'I am so happy!' she said.

Geraldine was the last woman to leave. It came to a contest of politeness between her and Lady Vanessa. Lady Vanessa had turned pale when Montana began to make his announcement, but her brave blood soon returned to her cheeks, and she stood firm as a graven image. As for Geraldine, whether from tension of nerves, or high spirits, or whatever it might have been, she felt no fear at all. She was not discomposed in the least. She had expected something bad, and this did not seem the worst that might happen. Clement was approaching her to urge her to go. She instinctively drew her arm into Marion's, as if to remind herself that her place was with him.

'Come, girl, you go along,' said Marion good-humouredly. 'There's really no great danger; but, still, the sooner you women get out of this, the sooner we'll all get out. Where's Melissa?'

He had not seen that she was by Montana. He turned to look for her. Clement was left a moment close to Geraldine. He caught her hand. 'Go, go, Geraldine,' he murmured to her; 'my love, my love!' and then his heart sank within him before the wild look of utter astonishment in her eyes.

Geraldine was going, but drew back to allow Lady Vanessa Barnes to pass. 'Standing on ceremony?' said Lady Vanessa; 'all right. I will take precedence if you insist upon it. But let's get it through, and not keep these poor men waiting. I am sure they are awfully frightened.' She passed round the platform and nodded good-humouredly to Montana. 'You are a good sort,' she said, 'after all; and that is a plucky little girl. But hadn't you better come with us, dear? It will be all right. The men will get out safely.'

'No,' said Melissa, with compressed lips; 'I will stay here.'

'Well, we'll keep the carriage for you—pray don't be too long.'

Lady Vanessa smiled, nodded, gathered up her skirts, and made

her way out as composedly as if she were leaving a drawing-room. Geraldine followed. As she left, she cast a look back on the platform and on the hall. The men remained obedient and disciplined as soldiers, although they were as motley and heterogeneous a set as could well be gathered together. Flame was now shooting, broad and lurid, across the ceiling of the hall, and some of the ancient rafters and beams might soon—no one could tell how soon—begin to give way. The smoke was pouring in, but not as yet in great volume. Those parts of the building which had begun to burn were not composed of material to send forth a very stifling smoke at once. So the hall was comparatively clear, and Geraldine could see distinctly as she went. She saw Montana standing in an attitude of statuesque quietude, holding Melissa's hand in his, and looking composedly over the scene, while Melissa's face was turned to him with looks of rapture and love.

As Geraldine and Lady Vanessa went out, the pent-up feelings of some of the men found vent in a burst of cheering, and the cheer was taken up and repeated.

'What are these confounded fools cheering for?' Trescoe asked of Marion.

'Because all the women are safe, don't you see; and because they behaved so pluckily.'

'And because they can save their own skins now,' Trescoe added sullenly.

'Well, I dare say that has something to do with it, too. Come along, Frank: let us save our skins.'

'I'll not stir a step until that confounded impostor and play-actor on the platform comes down with that girl. Look at him, and his confounded bravado. It's all showing-off, every bit of it. He'd sacrifice that poor girl for the sake of showing what a hero he is! Look at him!'

Montana's mind was exalted into a very empyrean of happy sensation. Danger was always to him what wine is to other men. It roused into animation his cold constrained nature, and gave it a freshness as of youth and joy. Just now he felt keenly the exultation of the moment, the rush of the blood through the veins, the inspiring excitement of his position. He had had disappointment of late, and perplexity, and despondency, and now he felt for the moment free of them all. 'If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy,' might have been his thought, although in a very different sense from that of Othello. He was tired of life; he was beginning to be conscious of failure;

and if his career might come to an end then and there, going out as if in a martyr's flame, it would be a closing scene worthy of his ambition. To picture himself in some heroic posture before the eyes of an admiring or adoring crowd was always Montana's desire and delight. For a moment the question rose up distinct in his mind—would it not be better to bring the whole thing to a close then and there? How could there be a finer and more picturesque conclusion? How dramatic, how lofty, how ideal would be this going out of a great career in crash and flame! That chord of Montana's nature which sometimes thrilled with wild irregular pulsation was now strained to intense susceptibility. He would have thought nothing of making himself a victim in the blazing ruins of the Church of Free Souls, he and it going down together. But he was not quite so selfish as Frank Trescoe had just described him. He felt some consideration for the pale, panting girl who held his hand in hers, and who looked up to him with eyes of rapture and devotion. Not that Melissa would have greatly cared even if he did carry his momentary thought into execution. She had no more love for life than he; far less love for life, perhaps, of the two; women in such a state of exaltation and devotion as hers do not care much whether life is to end just then or not. It was enough for Melissa that she was there with him. She would have abided with him, and seen the flames close around them, and heard the crashing rafters fall, and waited to the end with as much composure and courage as another Myrrha standing by another Sardanapalus. But Montana looked at her, and put the thought which had been forming itself in his mind abruptly and decidedly away. The hall was now nearly empty. Montana might easily have gone sooner if he had been anxious to escape, but he did not want to lose too soon the heroism of the attitude of one who remains to the last.

'Hadn't you better bring that girl out of that?' Trescoe cried to him in a voice choking with passion and with smoke. 'You've done the *pose plastique* business long enough. Do you want her to be stifled?'

The smoke was thick now.

'Come along, Montana,' Marion gasped out; 'every one is safe. Gad! what a plucky little thing Melissa is,' he said in a lower tone to Clement; 'I should never have thought it.'

'Come, Melissa,' Montana said gravely to the girl. 'They are all safe. We can go now.' He was satisfied with his own heroism and with her devotion.

He led her down the platform. But as she got on the floor she fainted. Montana lifted her in his arms and bore her to the door.

'The smoke was too much for her,' he said quietly to Clement as they went out together; 'the fresh air will revive her in a moment.'

The wild cheer which broke from the crowd as they were seen to come out made Melissa open her eyes; and she knew with joy that she was borne in Montana's arms.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ONCE MORE ON TOWER HILL

Most of us have observed with curious interest some of the old Italian pictures with their apparently irreconcilable varieties of personages, incidents, scenes, and types of character crowded within the one frame. There is a feast or a wedding going on in one corner, a skirmish of highplumed cavalry a little farther off, a palace in flames here, a waterfall there, a garden party of courtly dames and lovers in the foreground, while Jupiter and Juno, Venus and Bacchus, float in the air or recline on substantial clouds over the heads of the earthly personages. Common life is like this more often than we are apt to imagine. Take this scene on Tower Hill for example, the night when the Church of Free Souls was burnt; while that church, in fact, was still burning. Here, if one had had an opportunity of studying, he would have found that private loves and hates were at work, and were represented by persons who appeared to be only spectators of the fire. Private dislikes and class detestations, selfish personal interests and lofty public purposes, were illustrated unseen and unnoticed of all observers in the midst of that crowd and within the light of that conflagration. One might have imagined at first that those who stood and watched the fire were talking and thinking only of the fire. But if we try to discover what one or two groups here and there were talking or thinking of, and find that their talk and thoughts had little or no reference to the fate of the Church of Free Souls, we may perhaps not unreasonably infer that other groups of whose conversation we know nothing were sometimes equally indifferent as to what became of that temple, and were talking and thinking only of what concerned their immediate interest, as indifferent to the work of the flames as if it were but a family fireside, within whose comfortable glow they were seated.

Clement Hope did not, it is greatly to be feared, care much just at this moment whether the Church of Free Souls was to be saved or destroyed. He knew that all the people whose lives he valued were safe; he knew that the congregation generally were safe, and his thoughts soon became purely personal, not to say selfish. The expression in Geraldine's face when he let out his love was terrible to him; it was such an expression of alarm, it was so evidently genuine. It seemed like the death-sentence to his hopes, the wreck of his life. He fought his way recklessly through the crowd, meeting a face he knew here and a face he knew there, and passing on without a word of recognition. He had an impression of having looked into Frank Trescoe's face, and seen it livid with spite and wrath, and he wondered for half a moment, and then let all thought of Trescoe pass away. Frank Trescoe, too, was about this time little concerned for the fate of the Church of Free Souls. Geraldine meanwhile found herself borne by the crowd down the narrow street where the Church of Free Souls stood, and was carried round the corner to the open space of Tower Hill. She found that she was separated from her companions. She was not in the least alarmed. To be brought up in an inland American community makes a girl brave as it makes her honest. Geraldine had not the least idea that any personal harm could come to her because she could no longer see Captain Marion or any of his friends. She knew she had only to wait quietly somewhere and they would seek for her. Tower Hill was densely crowded, on the side of the Tower itself, but luckily for Geraldine the crowd was not great on the side where she found herself. Those who had rushed to the spot on the alarm of fire found, of course, that they could see the flames much better from the Tower side of the hill than from the other side, on which the narrow street opened, and where, indeed, those who were compelled to take their stand saw nothing more of what was going on than an occasional burst of lurid light across the sky over their heads. Geraldine, therefore, found herself in comparative quietude. Not very many paces from the corner of the street in which the Church of Free Souls was burning, she saw a little entrance, a sort of court with an iron gateway, which stood half open. There was a gas-lamp far down in the court, and she could see some neat-looking buildings of red brick, with brasses here and there that shone in the flickering light, the whole looking, as Geraldine thought even in that confused moment, temptingly like some Dutch interior in a

picture. Nowhere could she be better off than standing back in this little court behind the closed half of the iron gateway, and waiting till some of her friends came up that way and found her. She had not been alarmed even while the crowd was yet within the church, and the flames were spreading over them. There was a curious sense of unreality, a savour of the theatrical in the whole affair, which prevented Geraldine from being awe-stricken or terrified. She had an odd whimsical consciousness all the time of a suspicion that the whole scene was got up by Montana for the dramatic business of his part. The idea, of course, was merely chimerical, but it so affected her mind as to prevent her from regarding the crisis with the seriousness which it certainly deserved. Now that she was out in the open air, that she saw the excited crowds all around, saw the red flames spreading broadly across Tower Hill, and heard the crash of the falling beams and rafters, the rattle of the fire engines, the throb and splash of the hose, and the shouts and cheers and cries of the people, she became somewhat more impressed with a sense of what the reality was, and how terrible that reality might have been. Yet it must be owned that her thoughts were not for the moment fixed on the burning of the Church of Free Souls. The few hasty words that Clement had spoken had frightened her more than all the flame and crash of the fire. What could he have meant? Had she been mistaken in him all the time? With keen pain there was borne in upon her a memory of other words he had said, of looks and tones which at the time she had not dwelt on, but which now seemed to correspond only too well with the meaning, if she understood the meaning rightly, of the wild words he had spoken a few moments before. If that should prove to be so, if people had told her wrongly, or had been mistaken, about his supposed love for Melissa; if he really cared for her, and was ever led to believe that she cared for him, what a cruel misfortune for both of them! What ruin to two lives! How perplexed and how miserable her life would seem for the future! What was to be done now if this should prove to be true? If it should prove true? Already it seemed to be revealed to her conscience as if by light that it was true, and that she ought to have known of it before. The crowd kept streaming on in front of her, new comers always forcing the lines of the mob nearer and nearer to her place of refuge. The whole scene looked strangely picturesque, and yet not picturesque in such a way as Geraldine would have expected. In all her confusion of distracting

thoughts, she could not help observing with wonder that when she looked towards the place where she knew the Tower to be she could see no Tower lifting itself against the sky. She had not kept in her mind any clear idea as to heights, and distances, and proportions; and her impression was that the Tower of London so stood within its railings as to dominate the whole scene, and to be visible from all parts of Tower Hill, almost as a pyramid is visible from the plain. To her surprise now the Tower had gone out, as it were, behind its trees. The night was what sailors call a clear, dark night; but there was no moon. She could see the dark trees within the enclosure around the Tower; but for the Tower itself her eyes searched in vain, from the ground to the sky. Suddenly she saw Clement Hope amongst the crowd. He was evidently looking for some of his friends. She started and drew back further into her shelter; but the lamp that lit the little court shone too clearly against the darkness of Tower Hill outside not to make her easily visible. There was no one in the court but herself. None of the crowd cared to get there, for nothing of the fire could possibly be seen from it. Clement was looking everywhere as he went along. He could not fail to look down the court. He saw her; did not seem certain at first; then stopped, came to the gate, and called to her: 'Miss Rowan!' He did not say 'Geraldine.'

'I have got separated somehow from my people—from Captain Marion,' Geraldine said. 'I don't know how to get to them.'

She was confused and embarrassed now, not because she was lost in the crowd, but because she had come upon Clement so unexpectedly.

'Shall I take you home?' he asked.

'Oh, no! I could not think of leaving this place until I found them.'

'They are sure to be all right. I saw Captain Marion a moment ago; but somehow I have missed him. I saw Trescoe, too, but I have lost him in the crowd.'

'We had a carriage,' said Geraldine; 'if we could find that.'

'I saw some carriages over at the other side,' said Clement. 'Perhaps we could make our way to them; but it is not easy with this crowd. I think you had better let me get you out of the crowd at this end, and see you safely home.'

'No, I'll not go,' Geraldine said; 'we shall be sure to see them soon. They may be hunting about for me, and would think something had happened to me, and would spend their whole night in alarm. When people get lost in a crowd, it is

better to stay where they find themselves. Somebody will come to them in the end. You see you have come to me already,' she added, with a forced smile that gladdened him little.

'Then let us stay here. Are you not cold?'

'Cold! and on a night like this, and in this crowd, and with that fire blazing near us?'

'Yes, yes,' Clement said. 'I was not thinking of what I said. One doesn't always think of what he is going to say.'

'No,' Geraldine answered gravely, 'I suppose not.'

He felt that it must all come out now.

'I said something just now that seemed to surprise you. I hope I didn't offend you, Miss Rowan. I did not think——' he spoke very slowly, and got out the words with difficulty, each word following the other after a distinct pause. 'I did not think somehow that it would have surprised you. I thought you knew.'

'Thought I knew what?' Geraldine asked. His words made her angry. They seemed like an accusation.

'That you knew all I felt about you.'

'I knew nothing of the kind,' returned Geraldine warmly. 'How could I have known it? How could I have thought it? But there is something you don't know about me, or you would never have talked in such a way. Don't you know—don't you really know—that I am going to be married?'

Clement looked at her in utter astonishment.

'No, I see you did not know that. I see from your face that you did not know that.'

'How could I have known it?' Clement was in utter consternation now. At first he could hardly believe that she was serious, and yet as he looked into her face under the flickering light of the not distant flames, he could see nothing in it which was not serious. There was a moment's blank, sad silence.

'To whom?' he asked at last.

'To Captain Marion.'

A half-articulate sound of grief, and anger, and protest, broke from him. 'You going to be married to Captain Marion?' he said, 'why, he might be your father.'

'I have thought of all that,' Geraldine answered coldly, 'and I have made up my mind. Now, let us not speak any more of this. I know you will not when I tell you.'

'You have deceived me!' Clement said bitterly. 'Yes, it is quite true—you have! You let me go on day after day talking to you and hoping, and making love to you—yes, I did make love to you every day I saw you, and you must have known it,

and you never told me a word or gave me a hint of this. No; and how could I suppose such a thing? How could I suppose you were going to marry Captain Marion or anybody when you talked to me as you did? I thought you cared about me, Miss Rowan, I did indeed.'

'For shame!' she answered, 'to speak to me in this rude and cruel way. For shame to say that I encouraged you! Why, I knew, and everybody else knew, that you were in love with Melissa Aquitaine. Everyone said you were. You said yourself you were. You told Mr. Aquitaine so. Captain Marion knew it. We all knew it. There; I don't want to hear any more of this. Pray go away and leave me. I am perfectly safe here. Oh, I see Captain Marion—yes, there he is, that is he.'

'It is Captain Marion,' Clement said. 'He is looking for you. I will bring him to you; we can easily make our way through. Come with me.'

Captain Marion was squeezing his way through the crowd as well as he could, and standing on tiptoe, and straining his eyes, evidently on the quest for Geraldine. They were in a good-humoured part of the crowd, and Clement easily made way for Geraldine, and gave her into Captain Marion's charge. Then Clement plunged deeply into the thickest of the multitude, and let any living wave bear him whither it would. As for Geraldine, she felt for the moment only anger against Clement. It seemed to her an insult that he should accuse her, or even suspect her, of having encouraged him. His language seemed to say that she had acted a double part with him; that knowing of his love she had allowed it to grow, and had not said a word to discourage it. She felt so angry that at the time she had little thought left for anything else, for her own future, or Clement's, or for Captain Marion. Fortunately for her, Captain Marion was not likely at such a moment to study her manner very closely. If she seemed disturbed and incoherent, he naturally would set that down to the alarm caused by the scenes from which she had just escaped. So she went home that night thinking little of the danger she had passed through, and in which so many others had been involved, of the fate of the Church of Free Souls, of the melancholy cloud that seemed gathering over her coming life. She could only think of the friendship she had felt for Clement Hope, and of the cruel way in which he had misunderstood her. It was like receiving a blow from the hand of some loved friend to whom one looked only for tenderness and protection.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE END OF THE CHURCH OF FREE SOULS.

It was a strange scene, that now presented by the crowd on Tower Hill. The rescued congregation would of themselves have formed a sufficiently motley mass. There were artisans and their wives and daughters, earnest young clerks of Dissenting views and principles, from Peckham and Camberwell, and there were fashionable people from the West End. Some of the ladies belonging to this latter class sat in their carriages, wrapped in cloaks and shawls, and waited to see the last of the fire as if it were an exhibition. Men of the class and of the views of old Matthew Starr made their way through the carriages and audibly grumbled or cursed at the inmates, denouncing them as aristocrats, and wanting to know whether they thought they were seeing a show. The idea had got possession of the minds of many of the regular attendants in the Church of Free Souls that the fire was done by design, and according as their sympathies led them, some held it to be the malice of an aristocrat, some believed it to be the act of an unthinking and brutal mob. The freer souls were convinced that an ignorant and bigoted population of the lower class around the hall had set the building on fire, out of pure detestation for all freethought. The men of the class of Matthew Starr were convinced that some devotee of the bloated aristocracy had done the deed. Not a few believed it to be an act of just vengeance against Montana for his deceit, and others were equally convinced that it was the work of some malevolent creature, some sycophant of the higher class, who hated Montana because of the great things he had done for the poor.

All these conflicting emotions made the crowd who watched the fire from Tower Hill one in which an unusual element of bitterness and of passion prevailed. It was not in the least like the crowd which ordinarily rushes together to see a London fire, and which, save for those who are immediately concerned in the wreck, has no thought but one of idle curiosity, the sort of crowd that cheers for mere lightness of heart, and a sense of amusement and excitement, when another rafter falls in or another great burst of flame streams to the sky. There were compressed lips, and white faces, and passionate looks among the spectators who were massed together on Tower Hill, and hardly any group could become pressed against another without showing some feeling of antagonism, just as certain substances brought

together start flame or explosion. It was believed now that almost everyone, if not actually everyone, had been saved from the burning building. At least it was certain that all who were assembled in the great hall when the flames broke out might have been easily able to make their way into the safety of the open street. But there were some among the crowd who wondered what had become of old Matthew Starr. There were some of his fellows to whom he had more than once dropped his grim hints of revenge, and who could not help thinking that his hand must have been in this deed. They looked about for him everywhere, but could not see him. Lady Vanessa Barnes, seated composedly in her carriage, attracted a considerable share of attention. Many of the younger men, as they were forced against the carriage by the swaying of the crowd, looked up in undisguised and simple admiration at her stately presence, her beauty, and her rich dress. But some others of different mood scowled at her, and clenched their fists, and muttered bitter words under their breath. Lady Vanessa could see the expression of each kind of emotion, and was highly amused by both in turn. She had lost sight of those whom she knew in the church, and she waited now partly out of curiosity to see the end of the business, and partly to be certain that Montana had got off safe. Soon she saw, to her great relief and delight, Montana pressing his way through the crowd and carrying Melissa in his arms. She could see his face with its white hue and steady expression above the throng almost everywhere; the average height of that throng, many of them poor East-end artisans or Borough clerks, was not great. Montana was evidently astray in the crowd and trying to find some way out. Lady Vanessa stood up in the carriage and called to him.

Montana saw her, and made for the carriage. Lady Vanessa could not help admiring the mere physical strength with which, pushing his way through the crowd, he carried Melissa, her head reclining on his shoulder, as easily as if she had been a little child. But Lady Vanessa's quick eyes soon told her that the nearer Montana approached to the carriage the greater was the difficulty which he had in making his way. She began to think that, perhaps, the reason was because of the personal dislike which some of those around her seemed to have for herself as a bloated aristocrat, and she began to wish she had not called to him at all. But as Montana still came nearer, and she could hear what was said to him and of him, both by those around her and by those a little farther off, she became satisfied that there was a strong personal

hostility to Montana himself, in that quarter at least, and that most of those around had entirely forgotten her in their anger against him. The truth was that most of those who felt any strong hostility towards Montana had naturally made towards that part of Tower Hill where they saw Lady Vanessa and her carriage. Much of the feeling against Montana had begun because of his open and ostentatious acquaintance with this fine lady—this daughter of a duchess. It so happened, too, that Trescoe's little band of followers had taken up their position near the carriage, out of a sort of vague design of their own.

Trescoe had deserted his little band of bravoes when the burning of the church deprived him of his chance of interrupting and deposing Montana. But they kept together, and they were in a mood to do mischief. He had brought them there to make a disturbance, and they were not content to disperse without earning their money in some way, and making what they would have called a 'row' of some kind. Therefore they instantly and instinctively joined their forces with those of the men who were hooting and yelling at Montana. They pressed boisterously nearer and nearer, driving the others in upon him, at last forcing him close against Lady Vanessa's carriage. Some of the crowd, of those whom we may call the unprofessional disturbers—the men really acting on a bitter sense of supposed injury—were under the impression at first that the girl Montana carried in his arms was dead, that she was one of the victims of the fire, and that he was to blame for the whole calamity. They shouted fiercely at him; some of them shook their fists in his face; some called him liar and traitor, and even murderer. He was in great personal danger. He could not see any of his friends near him, and he seemed to be surrounded by personal enemies, whose temper was made the more dangerous with every second of time.

'Chuck her up here!' Lady Vanessa cried to him, blunt of speech as usual, but very good-natured and courageous. 'All right; I've got her! Now, dear child, sit down here with me, and don't be frightened. Jump in, Montana, and we will get away.'

'Where is your husband?' Montana asked.

'Never mind about him. He'll be all right,' Lady Vanessa cheerily said. 'Nobody has anything to say against him, you know. You get in. Get in at once, man; never mind those fellows.'

Montana turned and faced the crowd.

'Not I,' he said. 'I will never turn my back upon men like that. I have given my life to serve them and their class; and if they choose to assault me or to murder me they may. I was never afraid to defend them. I shan't defend myself against them.'

Yet Montana's heart turned sick at the thought of what seemed certainly before him. He knew the ways of crowds well enough. He knew that the most excited and reckless mob will fall back for a moment before the quiet, steady, unresisting defiance of one man. But he knew also that the moment the feeling of surprise passes away, the moment any one more reckless than the others makes a movement of attack, the crowd will rush blindly to their revenge. Mere personal fear Montana never felt; but there was in his mind a sickening repugnance to the thought of being dragged about by a crowd of ruffians, of being struck and beaten, and thrown down and trampled on; of trying to rise and being knocked down again; of all the unspeakable degradation which can be inflicted upon one defenceless man by a wild crowd in an instant of infuriate and savage passion. For a moment he felt a keen regret that he had not sacrificed himself resolutely in the Church of Free Souls. Was it possible that his career was to end here and thus—in a vulgar, ignoble scuffle in the mud of Tower Hill? He could not believe it. In his soul he appealed to his destiny to protect him against this, and for a moment he felt exalted into new spirit by his own appeal. Yet in one other moment the worse might have come. Lady Vanessa stood up in the carriage between Melissa and Montana, in order that the girl might not see what was going on, and was yet to happen. She called to Montana again and again to get into the carriage, and said she would drive through the lot of them, and drive over them and bring him safe, and she certainly would have attempted it if Montana would have consented to be rescued thus. But he stood firm to his purpose not to turn his back upon the crowd, and not to resist them. Had Trescoe been with the crowd he would have held back his little band at least from joining in a cowardly and brutal assault on one man. Trescoe had brought his roughs only to defend himself in case of need. But Trescoe had got separated from his party long ago, and was sulking somewhere on the outskirts of the crowd, trying to find Marion or anyone whom he knew, and anxious how to get out of the whole affair as soon as possible. There really seemed no chance for Montana. Suddenly Lady Vanessa, standing up as she was, saw a movement through the crowd near to her, but on the other side of Tower Hill. She saw that a rush was

evidently being made, a powerful and resolute rush by a number of men, apparently coming to Montana's rescue. They began to shout as they came near, and Lady Vanessa saw, as the light of a flame high in air passed over his upturned face, that Clement Hope was among them. She called to him, waved her parasol, and pointed, and gesticulated. Clement was indeed coming to Montana's help. Soon after he had left Geraldine and was rushing wildly through the outer fringe of the crowd, some men whom he did not know at first ran up against him, and one of them put his hand on Clement's chest.

'Look here,' he said, 'Mr. 'Ope, they're going to kill Mr. Montana over yonder—you ain't a going to stand that?'

'Who are going to kill him?' Clement asked in wonder.

'Don't know,' the man breathlessly answered, 'but I'm told they're some pals of old Mat Starr's, or they're bruisers from the West End, hired fellows I'm told, but I don't know.'

'Where is Montana?'

'I don't know, but I'm told he's gone to a carriage somewhere.'

'Come along,' said Clement, 'get all the fellows you can. Let's force our way through; call to everybody as you pass.'

He had a goodly number with him to begin with, and as they drove their way through the crowd, they shouted to everyone that Montana was attacked, that Montana was in danger, and that they must go to his rescue. Montana was still by far the strongest in popularity there, and a large proportion of the crowd through whom they passed only needed the word that he was in peril to make them wild to get at his supposed assailants. Clement had only too many followers; sometimes the whole bulk of the crowd at a particular point seemed to be with him, and they often made their progress more slow than it might have been. Clement was wondering whether they could ever get to Montana, whether they could make their way through the dense crowd, whether they could discover where he was in time to be of any use, when he heard the voice of Lady Vanessa. He saw her, and her carriage, and he knew by her gestures that Montana was near. One sole idea of tactical policy occurred to Clement. It was the only plan he could think of at the moment, all bewildered and ignorant as he was as to what was going on. 'There can't be any harm done,' he thought, 'if we try to clear a space round Lady Vanessa's carriage.' He shouted to those behind him, 'Come on, men, clear the way before the carriage. Clear everyone away between the carriage and the railings. But look out for Mr. Montana!' He knew

that even in their wildest confusion Montana's friends would recognise his form, and he assumed that Montana would be somewhere near the carriage. With the impetus of their rush and the force of the crowd behind them, hundreds of whom followed from mere curiosity, they literally went over the comparatively small band of Montana's assailants. Some were rolled under the carriage, some flung to the railings of the Tower on the other side, some driven back, jammed against the crowd behind them, far in the direction of the Minories. In a few seconds Montana was surrounded by his friends. It was only at that moment that Montana recognised Clement. 'Thank you, Hope,' he said quietly—'thank you very much. I shan't forget this.'

Melissa leaned forward with eyes of excitement, terror, and joy. She saw not without surprise that Clement seemed to be regarded as the hero of the hour.

'Now jump in,' said Lady Vanessa, 'and we'll get out of this at once. Mr. Hope, you seem in a sort of command here; perhaps you will kindly help to get the horses' heads round. We don't want to trample any decent people if we can help it.'

Clement and his friends exerted themselves. A score of men on either side of the carriage, and a vigorous group in front, made way as well as it could be done. And now the police began to arrive in formidable numbers, and the chances of a riot were over. Clement, to his great satisfaction, heard the carriage at last rattling away along Thames Street, and he turned once again from the scene of the night's adventures, the excitement of the moment wholly gone, and his heart again sinking with disappointment and bleeding with wounded love. He hardly knew where he went, or how he passed some of the later hours of that night. Certainly, he never could tell by what way he got from the Tower to some point at least two miles farther eastward. But suddenly jostling against some late wanderers, he wakened from a kind of walking dream, and found that he was lost in a maze of squalid streets somewhere in the Wapping region, and that the grey dawn was coming up in mist and thin droppings of dismal rain. It must have been raining some time, for his coat was wet. He wandered drearily back again and crossed Tower Hill once more. Passing the street where the Church of Free Souls had stood, he stopped and looked up at the ruins. He followed the humour which we are all apt to pursue in our egotistic hours of suffering, and seemed to associate the fate of that forlorn building with the wreck of his own

life. Every hope seemed to be as completely extinguished within his heart as the flames of that church were extinguished by the water that had gushed from the fire engines. Not those ruins themselves seemed bleaker and blacker and more hopeless than was Clement's heart as he went on westward amongst the squalid streets, and cared not whither he was going or what he did.

Only one human creature, besides wretched old Matthew Starr himself, was known to have perished in the fire. The firemen found Starr's body still perfectly recognisable, in the room which he had converted into a little magazine of combustibles. Outside the door of this room, on its threshold, divided from the body of Starr only by the remains of the half-burnt door, was found a dead woman. She was dead rather from suffocation than from fire. She was gaily dressed, and seemed young. Some professed to recognise her, and said it was Matthew Starr's daughter. Whether in some fit of penitence she had gone to the Church of Free Souls and found that her father was there, and when the fire broke out tried to get at him and so perished, was never known. But those who professed to identify her were positive that it was she; and it is certain that Fanny Starr was not seen any more from that day. Starr's freak of vengeance would seem to have wholly missed its mark: it struck himself and the daughter for whose sake he sought revenge. To be sure it struck the Church of Free Souls. That temple was gone. It never rose from its ashes a temple again. The site was soon occupied and turned to profitable account. On the ruins of the Church of Free Souls there stands a stately gin-palace. Somewhere about the spot from which Montana poured forth his dreams of a regenerated existence for men and women, and where Geraldine saw him standing erect and holding Melissa's hand, a plump and saucy barmaid now works a beer-engine and smiles on all comers.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LADY VANESSA'S BENEVOLENT INTERVENTION.

Montana's popularity lighted up again after the events on Tower Hill. The fire was the talk of London for days after. The waning season flickered up once more into a sort of animation as society discoursed of that eventful evening. People who had given up all idea of meeting their friends any more that season got up little improvised dinner parties to discuss the whole affair. The various versions of the night's event kept curiosity

and criticism alive by their conflicting authorities and assurances. The first report that spread through London was that the Church of Free Souls had been set on fire by a hostile and organised band, and that Montana was actually killed in the struggle which followed. Then there came a legend that Montana had lost his life in rescuing a girl from the burning. This presently softened down to the story that he had very nearly lost his life, but had succeeded in rescuing the girl and himself. Rumours differed widely as to the rescued damsel. Some who, of course, were not in society, said it was a fashionable and great lady, daughter of the Duchess of Magdiel; that Montana had, with superhuman strength and daring, succeeded in carrying her from the burning building, climbing heights and making descents in the midst of flames which Asmodeus himself could hardly have braved. Society, however, knowing Lady Vanessa Barnes, was sceptical about this, even from the first. Lady Vanessa was rather too tall and nobly built to be easily carried in the arms even of a hero of romance. Of course rumour was not unanimous in ascribing to Montana deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice. Some stories would have it that he was attacked by numbers of men and women whom he had deceived, and whose hopes he had blighted, and that so far from showing any courage, he had made an exhibition of the white feather. There were whisperings about an injured husband having taken part in the turmoil, and made out of it an opportunity for avenging his own personal wrongs. But the important thing for Montana seemed to be that it set him up again as the hero of the hour, that everyone talked of him and read about him, that the papers were full of paragraphs, leading articles, and letters concerning him, and that the police were busily at work to find out the nature of the organisation through whose action the Church of Free Souls had been destroyed. Late as the period was, any enterprising hostess might have counted on filling her rooms to excess if she could have only made it known that the company were invited to meet Montana.

Montana himself looked at the event with very different eyes. He saw in it nothing heroic, or gratifying, or exciting, but only a degradation to his life and a menace to the future of his career. After all that he had done to exalt himself in England to the position of unchallenged leader of a great movement, to the position indeed of lay priest and prophet, his efforts had only resulted in a vulgar street riot, in a personal attack on himself, from which he had to be saved by the sheer

physical strength of a friendly mob. However the newspapers or any ordinary observers might look on it, this sequel to his labours was to Montana a cruel anti-climax and bitter humiliation. Many and many a time did he in his bitterness feel deliberate regret that he had not sacrificed himself in the burning ruins of the Church of Free Souls. It was a mistake, he kept saying to himself over and over again. If he had known what was to come of it he would have remained within the burning house and brought his career to a close then and there. From his boyhood his worship had been for his career rather than for himself. What was to become of himself personally he cared comparatively little. The great thing was to have a brilliant career, and if he must disappear suddenly, to disappear as a comet does, not to be put out like the gas jet, or to flicker ignobly into darkness like the candle. He found himself, in the midst of all his little Indian summer of revived popularity, brooding constantly over the next chapter of his career, thinking and thinking what he was to do to recover from his late humiliation, and to redress the balance of the anti-climax. Something he was resolved to do. If he had, at any moment during that short time when he still believed he was to marry Geraldine Rowan, some thought of settling into a calm secluded life of happiness, he had no such idea now. His one purpose now was to find some way of ending with dignity. He cared but little for the death of Matthew Starr. As he had often said, he felt no regret for people's deaths. Men and women had to die sometime, and it seemed to him a matter of singularly little consequence whether they died to-day, or next year, or in ten years to come. This was his measure for himself as well as for others. He hardly bestowed two minutes' thought on the fate of old Starr, and when he had once expressed a sort of chill and formal regret for his former follower he alluded to the subject no more.

Montana's revived popularity had the effect of bringing him again into frequent companionship with Lady Vanessa Barnes. Through him Lady Vanessa became drawn into sudden intimacy with Captain Marion and his group. She visited them at all times. Her ponies were seen standing for hours together at Captain Marion's door. She brought Mr. Barnes there more often perhaps than he cared for, but he bore it with manful patience, and talked a great deal to Sydney Marion, who felt therefore intensely grateful to him. He seemed to like her society, she thought; he was one of the few men who appeared

to do so, and it was only in keeping with her fate that he should be a married man and married to a great lady. Lady Vanessa was greatly interested in the whole group. She concerned herself much with the approaching marriage and the marriage arrangements of Montana and Melissa. She was charmed with Geraldine. She pronounced Captain Marion an old dear, and said he was just the man with whom a pretty niece ought to enter a drawing-room. She persisted in regarding him as Geraldine's uncle, and at last Geraldine dropped all further protest. Marion and Geraldine had not yet mentioned to anyone but Montana the fact of their engagement, and they were not likely to begin their confidences with Lady Vanessa. Everyone in the group liked Lady Vanessa but Melissa. Melissa could not forgive her for even having been supposed at one time to have won the admiration of Montana. Geraldine frankly liked her, and, in familiar phrase, 'took to her.'

'I never knew a great lady before,' she said to Sydney Marion, 'and I always thought there would be something distant and haughty about them. In America we have a kind of idea that all English aristocrats are terribly haughty; that they keep everybody else at a distance. But I don't find her so. I find it hard to remember, when I am with her, that she is any higher in class than myself. She seems to me to be older, although I don't believe she is; but that is about all the difference I see.'

Lady Vanessa was quite happy in having discovered the Marions, and Geraldine, and Melissa, and having some new group in whom to interest herself. This was partly out of genuine good-nature. She was a high-spirited, happy, genial creature—a sort of compound of tom-boy and benevolent busybody—clever, shrewd, and courageous; ignorant as a schoolboy, but, unlike a schoolboy, not devoid of tact. It must be owned that part of the interest she felt in her new friends was owing to the fact that all her old friends had left town. The season was over for her and her set; but Mr. Barnes could not leave London just yet. He had business engagements, to which he stuck as closely as though he had not married the daughter of a duke. Lady Vanessa was really very fond of him, enjoyed his society, and would not leave town without him; and so she had perforce to stay. Therefore, the Marions, and Geraldine, and Melissa were as welcome to her as a new toy or a new playfellow to a child who is left at home while his family are away, and who does not at first know what to do with himself. 'Ain't it odd,' Lady Vanessa would say sometimes, 'how we are left alone in London?

We are the sole survivors. We ought to do all we can for each other, and try to make the place as bearable as it may be, for there is nobody else to talk to. I do believe I shall have to stay with Mr. Barnes in town until well-nigh on to Christmas, and you will be gone long before that, Miss Rowan; and what on earth am I to do with myself then?'

She was likewise much interested in Clement Hope, and asked Geraldine a great many questions about him. She said she was sure he was in love with somebody, and that things had gone wrong with him. She offered the opinion, which made Geraldine feel for a moment inclined to be angry, that Clement was remarkably like the man who fell out of the balloon—that is to say, that he 'wasn't in it.' She opined that he was in love with Sydney Marion.

Geraldine smiled so genuine a smile at this, that Lady Vanessa gave up that theory. Then she was sure he was broken-hearted about Melissa; and Geraldine said, with some hesitation, answering only for the purpose of getting rid of the whole subject if possible, that she fancied he had at one time been a little taken with Melissa, but she was sure there was nothing serious in it, and that he did not think of it now.

'Then I tell you what,' said Lady Vanessa; 'if he is not a lover of yours, Miss Rowan, I don't know what to make of it; and I am sure if I was he I should be just that.'

Geraldine became so evidently embarrassed, not to say distressed in manner, that Lady Vanessa's quick eyes saw in a moment that she had struck on a painful truth of some kind, and she had the politeness and good-nature to turn the talk away in a moment, and go on in the easiest way to some other conjecture about Clement, leaving Geraldine to believe that she had not formed the faintest suspicion as to the real state of the case. But Lady Vanessa had made up her mind, all the same, that Clement was in love with Geraldine, and either that Geraldine was not in love with him, or that some obstacle stood between them. Her restless good-nature determined at once to find out what the actual condition of things was, and see if she could not lend a helping hand to somebody. She was an excellent *camarade*—probably she would have described herself as a good 'pal'—and she felt convinced that something was amiss between Geraldine and Clement; that they were a pair of lovers, or would be if they could, and that it would be a glorious stroke for her if she could somehow intervene and make two lovers happy. To whom would any fearless intermeddler in such a case naturally

address herself but to the eldest of the party? Had there been a Mrs. Marion, Lady Vanessa would have gone to her straightway and asked her a series of direct questions, and got at the truth of the matter. But there was no Mrs. Marion, and therefore Lady Vanessa's quick interest directed her at once to Captain Marion. To Lady Vanessa Captain Marion was simply 'a dear old thing,' 'a charming old man.' Three-fourths of her time at least she regarded Geraldine as his niece, and in any case it would not have occurred to her to think that Geraldine was likely to be his wife.

'You never come to see me, Captain Marion,' she said to him one day; 'won't you let me give you a cup of tea at five? We are all alone now, and I am awfully dreary. It would be an act of charity on your part to come and talk to me some afternoon. Coming and dining is all very well; but I don't get any talk with you, and you have been about the world a deal, and I am very fond of soldiers; I like every soldier. Do come and have a cup of tea with me. I have some lovely Russian tea.'

Captain Marion could not but be flattered by the lively lady's frank, pleasant ways. The very tone of her voice had a good-nature in it which had a charm for a man like Marion. He did not know that she regarded him merely as a dear old thing, and even if he had known it he would have liked her none the less, nor felt the less anxious to go and take a cup of her Russian tea, and talk with her. So he paid her a visit one day alone. He dressed himself, perhaps, with a little more than his usual care, and looked indeed a very handsome, graceful specimen of a man just past the prime of life, who has been a soldier and a traveller, who liked the society of women, and could always make himself agreeable.

'What a darling girl your Geraldine is,' Lady Vanessa said, 'and that handsome young fellow, Clement Hope, who is he? Now tell me something about him, won't you?—he interests me greatly. There is a picture exactly like him in Venice, I think, or Florence, or somewhere; a picture of a young Venetian painter, I think—just the same kind of eyes, with a figure like that, a figure that gives you the idea somehow of a tall young tree a little bending to the wind, don't you know? Does it strike you so, Captain Marion?'

'He is a charming young fellow,' Captain Marion said earnestly. 'He has plenty of talent; but he has led too lazy a life up to this; not his fault, I should say, not his fault at all. He is going to turn to now and do something to make his life useful in some way.'

'Strikes me he is crossed in love,' said Lady Vanessa.

Captain Marion smiled.

'Well, I believe there was something of the kind,' he said. 'I hear that he was very fond of Melissa Aquitaine.'

'Not a bit of it,' Lady Vanessa answered. 'Don't you believe a word of that.'

'Oh! but there was something, I assure you.'

'Was something?' said Lady Vanessa. 'Yes, there may have been half a dozen somethings. I dare say there were. A young man like that does not get to his time of life without having had a good many somethings. But there is nothing now. He does not care about her now, I can assure you.'

'How do you know?' asked Marion, in wonder.

'Well, I don't know how I know—by looking at him—I know by observing things. When she comes into the room he hardly looks up, hardly observes her. Oh no! it is not that. I have quite other ideas, Captain Marion, about your young friend. You make your mind easy. It is not the future wife of our dear Montana he cares about. Oh no!'

Captain Marion looked astonished, and his expression was not exactly that of a man who feels bound to make his mind easy. He looked as if he was not making his mind easy.

'It is Miss Rowan,' Lady Vanessa said, nodding her head at him decisively; 'trust to me for that. What is wrong between them, Captain Marion? You take my word for it; he is in love with Miss Rowan.'

Captain Marion almost started. 'I don't think——' he said. 'No, Lady Vanessa, I am sure—I am quite sure—you are mistaken.'

'Not a bit of it! Ask any woman who knows him, and has seen him. She'll tell you the same thing. Ask Miss Rowan. She will tell you. I should not like to ask her. She would think it rude, perhaps; but there is something strange, and I want to set it right, if I can. Yes, Captain Marion, the poor young man is in love with Geraldine, and I tell you what, I'll give you any odds you like that she is in love with him.'

CHAPTER XXXV.

MELISSA'S HONEYMOON.

THE crowning event of Melissa's life had come off. She had attained what ought to have been the very height of her happiness. The wildest dream of her fond fancy had been fulfilled.

She was married to Montana. The marriage took place in a church near her father's house, in the northern city, and after the ceremony Montana and his wife stayed for a few days at a quiet watering-place forty or fifty miles away. It was not any of the usual resorts of couples on their honeymoon, but a steady-going, rather out-of-the-way place, which fashion had not yet found out. There they remained for a few days, but for a few days only. Montana had his preparations to make for his voyage across the Atlantic, and time was running short. It seemed strange to Melissa to find herself thus alone with her idol, and stranger still to find that after all there was less of the wonderful and more of the commonplace about it than she might have imagined. Montana seemed to her to be always in a cloud or in a dream. He was kindly to her in every way. He seemed anxious to attend to all her wishes, and even to forestall them. But there was nothing about him of the genial playful way which her father always had, and which made life so pleasant for her with Mr. Aquitaine, if she could only have known it at the time. She was married to Montana, and yet she did not seem to have approached any nearer to him in spirit than when they walked round Tower Hill that day together and she conversed with him for the first time. A curious fact is that until the moment when he signed himself 'Edmund Montana,' on the occasion of their marriage, she did not even know what his Christian name was. Montana walked out with her constantly while they were staying alone on what ought to have been their honeymoon trip, a honeymoon of three or four days. He conversed with her a great deal, but it was only conversing with her. There was nothing of the fond close talk of the young husband or of the lover. He told her a good deal about his plans with a cold suavity of tone that seemed somehow to convey to her the idea that he did this as a matter of propriety and of duty. His manner seemed to say, although nothing could be more gracious and kind, 'I don't suppose, Melissa, you really understand much about this, but we are now husband and wife, and I think it is part of the duty of a properly-minded husband to explain all his plans and purposes to his wife, even though she may now and then fail to understand them. So I tell you all this, Melissa, but if you do not quite understand it does not matter. I have performed my proper part in telling, and you have performed yours in seeming to listen.'

Yet the little girl was happy. She was sometimes rapturously,

ecstatically happy. She could sit and gaze at him through a whole evening. When they walked together she could look away from the sea, and the sky, and the sunlight, or the stars, and only turn her eyes on him, her one star. It was enough to be with him, and to lean her hand upon his arm, and to hear his voice, and to know that she was married to him, and bore his name. A fearful pride, too, mingled in her joy: a pride full of dread lest anything might intervene, even now, to take him from her or to make him forget her. She dreaded the prospect of being left behind without him when he crossed the Atlantic; left alone in the house that once was so pleasant to her but now would be so dreary, where she could only spend the days in thinking of her absent husband and fearing for something to happen. She would have besought him to take her with him to America, but on this point he had already declared his purpose, and she had not the courage even to expostulate. Her love and her recent suffering seemed to have washed all the petulance and all the high spirit away from her, and left her submissive, languid, almost broken down. Mr. Aquitaine, too, had thought at first it would be better she should go with Montana across the ocean, but Montana seemed to have given him some reasons which satisfied him. It would be rough work at first, and if Melissa did go she would have to be left behind in some great hostelry in New York, or at farthest in Chicago, while her husband laid out the lines of his colony. Mr. Aquitaine agreed that this would not do, and that Melissa on the whole would be safest and happiest in her father's house until her husband could return for her. When the days of their short holiday had passed they returned to Aquitaine's home. Montana was not to go back to London any more for the present, but was to leave for America without seeing the metropolis again. Montana was anxious to get away. If it had ever been his nature to show impatience he would have shown it now. He was surprised one day to receive a letter from Clement Hope in which Clement told him that he was getting sick of the Old World, and longing to begin his project in America; that he had changed his mind about waiting a little longer, and that he would leave Europe by the same steamer which carried Montana westward. Montana showed the letter to Mr Aquitaine, and asked if Aquitaine could suggest any explanation of Clement's sudden determination.

'Surely,' Aquitaine said, 'you and he had better put your heads together and combine your projects. What can you want with two separate colonies at the same time? You don't want to

run in rivalry; and besides, Clement Hope knows nothing about these things. His resources will run out before he has made a satisfactory start. He had much better go in with you. I will write and tell him so.'

'I should be very glad,' Montana answered coldly, 'of his helping hand, if it were to be a helping hand. I owe him a good turn: I like him: I should be glad to make use of him, and to assign him a place that would be useful, but I don't admit partnerships in plans like mine. I don't like explaining my ideas to anyone until the moment comes for putting them into action, and I don't always care to explain them even then. I want men to believe in me, and to work with me, and to take orders and ask no questions. I am afraid Clement Hope has got it into his head that he can do something great upon his own account. Let him do so by all means. The more of us who have faith in ourselves, and can put our faith into action, the better. But I could have nobody working with me who was not willing to work on my inspiration, to take it on trust, and do as he was ordered.'

'I should think Hope would be delighted to work under you.'

'I don't know. Some change has come over him lately. He seems odd and cold, and he has kept away from me. I am glad to find by this letter that he offers his friendship again. I shall take it just as it is offered. I owe him a good turn, as I have said; and I never look for offence. So I never receive any—or seldom at least,' he said slowly, as some recollection of Trescoe came into his mind. 'And I never answer coldness by coldness.'

Aquitaine gave vent to something almost like a sigh. 'I only wish you would answer warmth by warmth,' he said to himself, as he looked into Montana's impassive, handsome face, and thought of poor Melissa, her quick impatient temper, her wild love, her sudden little gusts and changes of emotion, her longing for affection, even the fitful poutings with which she sometimes met the affection when it was offered, and he wondered what sort of life would be before her in the long future with this strange husband, who had taken her, not for love, but only out of charity.

Montana and Melissa often walked out together these bright evenings of early autumn. Sometimes they wandered along, apparently without purpose, through suburbs on which every day warehouses were making fresh ravage, along patches of strand by the river which were menaced every week by new experiment in dock and warehouse, and through greenwoods which had already the shadow of their destination to building

lots cast over them. Now and then coming to some particular spot, Montana struck quite away from the direction in which hitherto they had been going, and brought Melissa through tortuous windings of suburban streets and roads as if he were looking for some particular place, and then apparently having failed to find it, or having found it and seen enough of it, turned back again and resumed their old track. She could not help asking him once whether he knew the place long ago, and he answered that he did, that he had been there when a boy, but there were so many changes it was not easy to know any place again. One evening they came to a bank just above the river. It was on the verge of sunset, and they were looking westward. Montana stood for a moment in silence. Then it seemed to him that the arm of his companion leaned heavily on his, and looking down at Melissa, he saw that she was fatigued.

'You are tired,' he said. 'Let us sit down here for a moment.'

Looking around, he had seen that there was a wooden bench under a decaying tree not far from them. He brought Melissa to it, and they sat there. For all that Montana could do he could not bring his thoughts to fix themselves on Melissa. It did not seem as if he were really married to her, as if she had become a part of his life. He could not think of him and her as living on together through years. He was not a man given to regrets. Things that were past were done with him, as with Mark Antony, and when once he had made up his mind that it would be well for him to marry Melissa he never went back upon the subject. It was settled, and there was an end of it. But the conditions under which they had been married seemed to prevent him from entirely realising the fact, and from admitting it as part of his life and of his thoughts. He found his mind wandering away from her, and his eyes turned vaguely westward. Perhaps he was thinking at first that his own course would soon bear him westward. Suddenly, however, another thought, a memory, came into his mind. The scene, the place, were not indeed the same as those which he now remembered with a shock of disquiet, and even of pain. But there was resemblance enough to cheat the mind for a moment into the idea that it was the same place, and at all events Montana and his young wife were so sitting that their eyes naturally turned towards the setting sun. Suddenly he rose to his feet.

'Come, Melissa,' he said, 'and let us go away from this. I don't like this place.'

'Why not?' Melissa asked wondering. 'It's—it's very pretty, isn't it?'

'It is very pretty, I suppose, but I don't like it. It makes me feel uncomfortable. I don't know why. There is something chilly about it. But it is very pretty, and, if you like, we'll stay here,' he said, sitting down again.

'Oh no, I don't care about it. I never cared about Nature, and sunsets, and that sort of thing. Nature seems to me awfully dull, and all sunsets are very much alike. I don't want to stay here. Let us walk on farther.'

'You don't care about Nature?' Montana said in a vague sort of way, not quite knowing what he was saying.

'No,' Melissa answered; 'I only care about people, and not about many of them either. Don't you remember telling me once that in this world we must live in the present and for the present, and not in the past?'

'Did I tell you that? Where was that?'

'Oh, don't you remember? But of course you don't; you would not remember it as I remember it, you have no reason to. Well, it was that day, that first day that ever I talked to you—when we were walking together on Tower Hill. You said we both agreed in opinion, although then I don't think I had any opinion at all. I think I only meant that I was not troubling myself about the past, because I was only troubling myself about you.'

Montana turned and looked into her wistful face, and the eyes seeking his own. The sight brought the old memory back to him.

'Well, let us go, dear,' he said; 'I don't care about Nature either, and I don't want to have much to do with the past. I had rather shut it out from me if I could. But anyhow I don't like this place. It makes me uncomfortable. Let us go!'

So they went, and she, leaning on his arm, could hear him murmuring some words to himself. He murmured them again and again till at last she caught the sound.

'What is the comet of a season?' she asked.

'What?' Montana asked in turn, looking, for him, almost confused.

'The comet of a season? You have been saying that over and over again. What does it mean?'

'It is only a quotation from a poem, Melissa. I am not certain really what poet it is. I think it is Byron. I have not read much poetry, but I remember these words.'

'They are pretty words,' said Melissa; 'I wonder what they mean?'

'I don't know. They came into my mind somehow. I heard them long ago in a place like this.'

'All comets are of a season, are they not?' Melissa asked, seized for once with a desire to acquire exact knowledge. 'I have seen ever so many comets. They come for a while, and shine all over the sky, don't they, and then they go away?'

'Yes,' said Montana, 'that is so, exactly.'

'But they come back again,' Melissa persevered; 'I am sure the same comets come back again, after a long time perhaps.'

'They do,' Montana gravely answered. 'That happens in the sky, Melissa; with the comets that appear in the sky. But I think those words I have been saying mean human comets, and such comets of a season don't always re-appear. When they go out, they are not seen any more, and it is much better that it should be so—much better.'

Melissa was silent. She had not the faintest idea of the meaning of his words, but there seemed something in them melancholy and ominous, which cast a gloom over their way home.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

'THE POWER THAT MADE BOY AND GIRL.'

NEVER were there more miserable days than those which Clement Hope was now passing. He suffered intensely, and all the more because it seemed to him that he had no right to complain. His idle and transient passion for Melissa, that unreal boyish affectation of love, had been foolishly cherished by him, and ostentatiously exhibited and proclaimed after the fashion of youth, when it is pleased to fancy itself in love, and is proud of its own sham and self-delusion. He hated to think of this now. He looked back with shame and anger upon his former rhapsodies, and ravings, and attitudinisings as the hopeless lover of poor Melissa. Such folly, he felt, took away from him now all right to complain. Why should Geraldine think for a moment of one like him, whom she had seen only the other day apparently steeped in love for another girl, a girl far beneath her own level in intellect and in heart, and how could she now be expected to regard him in any serious light? She could but laugh at him and despise him. Only for his colonisation scheme and its incessant demands and details, Clement sometimes felt as if his life could not go on; as if he must have ended all the

difficulty by going out of his senses. The nights above all were trying to him. He came home late and tired to the lonely house looking on the dismal canal, and he could not sleep. He mounted the little observatory on the roof, and looked abroad over the trees and grass of the park, and saw the sky reddened by the lights of the great city. He outwatched the bear and the 'sun of the sleepless,' the 'melancholy star,' and only fell into a fitful sleep at last when morning had come and the roads and streets began to be alive again. Sometimes he went out before the dawn, and wandered about the roads, and climbed a little hill in the neighbourhood, from which he had a confused view of London shining somewhere in the near distance, like a mass of glow-worms in a hollow. He hated the lonely ghostly house, and yet he would not leave it to live anywhere else. He would not leave it even for a night. He felt a kind of savage self-torturing pleasure in condemning himself to its loneliness, and its shadows and its memories. Day and night the one feeling possessed him. He had found out his love too late, and had found out at the same time that he was not worthy of such a love. Sometimes he raged at Geraldine, and told himself that she was marrying only for money, for a home, for position, that she was throwing away her youth and her beauty and her intellect on a man old enough to be her father, selling herself, as many another girl was doing, for mere worldly advantages. Such a thought, filling him for the time with an angry feeling against the girl, gave him the momentary courage of resentment. But he soon found that courage bought at such a cost is not worth having, even to a disappointed lover. It is only like the courage supplied by the maddening stimulus of some strong drink. It is factitious and unwholesome, and leaves its dismal hours of reaction and depression, its lonely wasting heartache, instead of the headache which the other excitement bequeaths in dying. And, besides, Clement was not in his right mind when he allowed such a thought to possess him, even for a moment. He knew this. He never could believe anything evil of Geraldine. Let her motive be what it would, it must be a good one and worthy of her. He could only suppose that she either did love Captain Marion—after all, such things had happened—or that she felt she could care for no one else in the sense of deepest love, and was therefore willing to marry a man for whom she had a sincere respect and affection. Anyhow it was all the same to Clement. She was lost to him. She never could even know how truly he loved her, and how fully he appreciated her. That bitter

immemorial remonstrance with fate which the disappointed lover makes, 'if she could only know'—'if she could only understand all'—that remonstrance was always in Clement's heart, if not on his lips. He himself had rendered this impossible. She never could know him as he really was, never could understand that his love for her was deep and real, and even in his sufferings he could not hope for kindly sympathy. Nothing was left for him but to go away, and never to come back again. On this he was resolved. He would not return to England.

While in this mood he received one day a few friendly lines from Montana, thanking him for the part he had taken in the rescue on Tower Hill, and expressing a regret that they could not meet again before Montana left for America. At once the thought came into Clement's mind, 'Why wait any longer? Why not go to America at once, and in the vessel with Montana?' The thought became a resolve. He wrote to Montana, and told him of his determination. The thought that he was to leave England so soon gave Clement new strength and courage. Say what we will, we can none of us in our souls believe that in changing our skies we do not change our hearts. It is impossible not to indulge in the fond fancy that every grief is cured, that every disappointment is redeemed and repaired, by the simple process of going away. Peace always seems to be on the other side of yonder purpling mountains; peace, too, and refreshment to the weary heart will always seem to lie a shadowy land of gold across the sea. The thought of going away is almost like the knowledge of coming death; it pacifies wild emotions, makes disappointment seem a trivial thing, and vaguely promises a renewal of love and hope and youth. So Clement began to feel, now that his going away from England was but a question of days. Willingly would he with Byron's hero have told the vessel that was to carry him that he cared not 'what land thou bear'st me to, so not again to mine.' Such were Clement Hope's feelings; and for the hour they were as strong and as sincere as human feelings well can be. He was in the true exile mood—unless things should change.

Meanwhile Lady Vanessa's words had sounded a note of alarm in Captain Marion's mind. The alarm was the more keen because the impression given from outside only corresponded after all with a certain impression that had long been forming itself within. In order to continue even moderately satisfied with himself, Marion had had to assure himself many times of late that he was doing the best thing he could for

Geraldine in marrying her. He sometimes found himself looking at her with a certain tender and pitying glance, contrasting for the moment her bright youth with his advancing years, and wondering to himself whether a girl, however high-minded and devoted, could be happy with a husband so much older than herself. 'It is all very well,' he used to think, 'for the present'—used to think, that is to say, in his moments of doubt and despondency. 'It is all very well for the present—or not all very well—but how will it be ten years hence, when she is little more than thirty—and a married woman is only in her prime then—and I shall be far on the shady side of sixty? Am I doing wrong to the girl? She is only marrying me to please me. Am I doing a mean and shabby thing?' Then, again, as Geraldine brightened up when he talked to her, he told himself it was all for the best, that he would make her happy, that he would be perhaps more devoted to her than a younger man might be, and he looked around the circle of those whom he knew, and he saw no young man worthy of her whom he could suppose Geraldine would marry. Many a time the idea came to his mind that if Clement Hope had not been so absurd as to fall in love with Melissa, he would have been a young man whom Geraldine might have cared for. For a time Captain Marion could always remind himself that he was saving Geraldine from the influence of Montana, and at Geraldine's own request. How unlucky, he thought again and again, that Montana should ever have come amongst them. Who could have supposed that the influence of any one man could be so strangely disturbing to a whole group of people? Nothing was the same since Montana came. Katherine and her husband were not the same. Melissa was not the same. Mr. Aquitaine was not the same. Geraldine and Marion were thrown together strangely in a manner hardly welcome to either, utterly unexpected, and all because of Montana's coming. This mood of occasional doubt and occasional reassurance prevailed until Montana's offer of marriage to Melissa and her acceptance. Then Captain Marion's position became one of still greater doubt. Now that Geraldine was free from the importunity of Montana, and from what she seemed to think the dangerous spell of his influence over her, how would she feel with regard to her engagement to marry Marion?

While such doubts were filling his mind came Lady Vanessa's direct outspoken words. Marion for a moment felt a pang of jealousy as keen as if he had been really a young man madly in

love with Geraldine, and had been deceived by her. He went home that day determined to open his eyes and see for himself; determined, too, for all his pangs of jealousy, to take care that Geraldine's happiness was cared for, whatever might occur, first of all. He thought of going directly to Geraldine and asking her, but, after a moment's reflection, he felt that this would be a rough and clumsy step to take. Geraldine was a candid girl, and she had never yet hinted to him or allowed him to suspect that she cared for anyone more than for him. She was a girl, as he knew, with a strict sense of duty, and he did not believe that she would have consented to marry him if she was conscious of loving some one else. It might well be, then, supposing there were any truth in Lady Vanessa's conjecture at all, that Geraldine was not yet conscious of any strong feeling towards Clement Hope, or, at least, that she did not quite know the nature of the feeling, and only took that for warm friendship which was genuine love. Of course, it might be that Lady Vanessa was mistaken. That sprightly lady seemed the kind of woman who would jump to conclusions very quickly, and who, taking a lively interest in other people's affairs, would be apt to go wrong as often as she went right. So Captain Marion thought he would quietly watch over Geraldine—'watch over her' is an expression that much better describes his feelings towards the girl than if we had said he determined to watch her—and if he saw any reason whatever to believe that she was keeping up her engagement to him out of mere devotion, or kindness, or reluctance to draw back, he would set her free and try to make her happy. In truth he would be making no great sacrifice in this, for he felt far too much doubt and dread about the hasty engagement to find much happiness in it. His was not, we are ready to admit, a very heroic nature. He ought to have known his own mind from the beginning. He ought not to have acted upon impulse. He ought to have been strong and clear of soul. But we are not describing a man who felt and said and did exactly all that he ought to have said and felt and done, and at precisely the right time. We are only describing Captain Marion. If anyone condemns or dislikes Captain Marion for his weakness and his errors, we can only say that we think he is in many things to be condemned, although not to be disliked. It is certain, at all events, that the world is not filled with strong heroic men who never make mistakes, and if there are more such persons than we have hitherto seemed to take account of, there may perhaps be all the more excuse for

Captain Marion, because he will then be only one of an insignificant few. One merit at least Captain Marion had; he was determined that others should not suffer for his mistakes, if he could only see his way to put things straight once more. His one great anxiety now was to be guided in some way to the doing of this aright.

While Marion was still in this anxiety there came a letter from Clement Hope, telling him that he had made up his mind to go to America at once, and in a few words of generous feeling taking what seemed to be a final leave of his friends. Marion felt that now the opportunity had come. He wrote to Clement, begging him to come and see him next day, or some early day, and insisting that he must not leave town without a farewell in person. So Clement came the next day, and Marion had a long talk with him, and did not find much difficulty in getting at the fact that the young man's resolve to settle in America, and not return to England any more, was not by any means the result of a philanthropic anxiety to cast in his lot for ever with the people of the new colony.

'You must see Geraldine Rowan before you go,' Marion said suddenly.

Clement coloured so highly that Marion felt his own cheek redden in sympathy. It was not difficult to read that little heart-secret, Marion thought.

'I don't think it would be right to disturb her,' Clement said slowly. 'I don't suppose she will expect to see me. No, I think not, Captain Marion. Why should I put her to the trouble?'

'I am sure she will expect to see you. Let me go and ask her.'

'No, thanks, no, I couldn't think of it,' Clement said. 'She must not be disturbed. You will say everything kind for me to her, and you will let me know how you are all going on, won't you?'

He brought out these words in a stammering, almost choking, voice.

'Wait a moment,' Marion said promptly, 'I will go and see Miss Rowan.' He hurried out of the room, and he was lucky enough to find Geraldine alone.

'Geraldine,' he said gravely, 'Clement Hope has come to see me. He is going away to America at once. He is going with Montana, and he tells me he has no intention of ever coming back again. Won't you see him before he goes—for the last time?'

Geraldine turned pale and trembled. Even if Captain Marion had suspected nothing before, he must have seen by her agitation

that the news was a shock to her, more great than even the parting with a dear friend could have given.

'I don't think I should like to see him,' she said. 'I think I had better not, Captain Marion. No, I think I'll not see him.' She looked up and met his inquiring eyes, and her eyes did not venture to remain fixed on his. They dropped with a half-scared, half guilty expression.

'Geraldine,' Marion said, going up to her, and taking her hand, 'I wonder have you been quite candid with me of late?'

She looked at him now with a little more courage. 'I should always like to be candid with you,' she said.

'Is Clement Hope in love with you?'

Geraldine stopped for a moment. Then she looked up and answered quietly:

'He said so—once; but he did not know when he was saying so—he did not know anything. He would not have said a word of the kind, I am sure, if he had known. I told him not, and he will never say so again,' she added piteously.

'You did not tell me this.'

'I could not,' said Geraldine. 'It was not my secret, but his. I could not tell about him.'

'Come, tell me! you know I only care about your happiness.'

'I did not know at the time,' Geraldine pleaded. 'Oh, Captain Marion, I did not know; indeed, I never thought of anything of the kind. I did not understand my own feelings. But it does not matter. I will keep them down and conquer them. I could not have told you of this at the time'—she meant to say—'at the time when I promised to marry you,' but she baulked at the words. 'Indeed, indeed, I never had any thought of it myself.'

'But it is so?' Marion said gently.

'Oh, forgive me! forgive me!' poor Geraldine said. 'It is so—it is so, if you must know it. Can you ever forgive me?'

'Why, yes, girl,' Marion answered cheerily. 'You know very well that I only offered you a sort of asylum to save you from being worried by Montana. That was how it all began. I offered you a raft when there seemed no chance of your having passage in a better vessel. But now that the better chance has come I am only too glad to give it to you.'

'Oh, how can I?' Geraldine asked; 'how can I treat you so, and abuse your kindness? You are always so kind and dear to me, like a father.'

'Quite so,' Marion said, with a smile; 'there it is, Geraldine.

I was like a father to you, and felt like a father, and I never ought to have allowed myself to think of you in any other way than as a daughter. But I wanted to save you from trouble, and I didn't know of anything that was going on, and I had not my eyes open, I suppose; but anyhow, perhaps I cannot be blamed, since you did not know it yourself. There is one good thing, girl; nobody knows a word about all this, except Montana, and he won't tell on us. I think my Katherine suspected something. She has prying eyes, and a rather prattling tongue; but she won't be likely to talk so much now as she might at some other time. She has her own affairs to think of. It is all right, Geraldine. Nobody will know, and I am happy in the thought of making you happy.'

'But this is all uncertain,' Geraldine said. 'He has not asked me. I didn't know he was going away. He might have told me that much, at least.' She was inclined to be angry with Clement.

'See him for a few moments,' Marion said, 'and tell him to write to you. That will be enough, don't say any more. You need not. He must go out to America and do something, and show himself a man of spirit and energy When he has done that, things will come all right. Of course, you could not rush into an engagement with him as you might rush into an engagement with me. His, I fancy, would not be got out of so easily, or with so little pain on either side.'

There was nothing ironical in these words. Marion was saying merely what he felt. As he left the room some words that occur in 'Faust' about 'the Power that made boy and girl' came into his recollection. They are used by Mephistopheles; but Marion did not remember that at the moment, and he put them to a better application than would have delighted Mephistopheles. 'The Power that made boy and girl,' Marion said to himself, 'made them for one another.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

'EVERY WISE MAN'S SON DOTH KNOW.'

As Marion was on his way to Clement Hope he encountered Katherine Trescoe. A few days before Marion would gladly have avoided meeting his daughter. He would have dreaded her inquisitive glances and her saucy suggestive words. Now he felt free to meet her with a high head. 'No wonder I was ashamed to meet the girl,' he thought; 'fancy a man of my age

persuading a girl as young as his own youngest daughter to marry him.' He felt all the more drawn towards Katherine because of the consciousness that he had gone so near to doing a foolish thing. 'Why should I have blamed her so much?' was his thought. Katherine seemed now to appeal to sympathy. Captain Marion need not have feared her glances or her words so far as he was concerned. Poor Katherine's glances had lost their inquisitiveness of late, and her words had ceased to be saucy. She was concerned about her own life and her future more than about the doings and the follies of others.

Captain Marion barred her passage:

'Well, Kitty, when are you off for Paris? You had better get under way as fast as you can; it will be growing late. We shall be after you almost at once. What does Frank say?'

'I don't know, papa dear,' Katherine answered; and her look was very piteous. 'I haven't seen Frank since morning. He hardly ever speaks to me now.' Her eyes were filling with tears.

'Frank's in the house, my dear; he is in the library; I saw him there ten minutes ago.'

'Is he? I didn't know.'

'Look here, Kitty; don't be foolish. Frank's a very good fellow at heart, and awfully fond of you, if you would only let him. He is angry with you, and I don't blame him; you did make yourself ridiculous. There, there, I'm not finding fault; I am only putting you in the way of mending matters. Go to your husband, child—go to him frankly and tell him you know you were wrong, but that you thought no harm at the time, and that you are sorry now. Frank is as well satisfied as I am that you never thought any harm; he never had any doubt of you that way—not a bit.'

'If I could only think that,' Katherine began.

'You may be sure of it. He was angry because you made yourself and him ridiculous; and he was quite right. Go to him and talk to him freely, and tell him you know now that you ought to have had more sense, and that you are sorry, and see if he doesn't take you in his arms and kiss you without more ado. Come—go along.'

He pushed the young woman before him with genial roughness, and did not leave her until they had reached the library door.

'Now go in, Kitty, and have this over.'

'If he won't speak to me, if he is angry?'

'Oh, go in, girl, and try; it will all come right.'

Captain Marion gently opened the door, and pushed his

daughter in. Frank was standing with his back to her as she entered. She went softly up to him and put her hand upon his arm. He turned round, not thinking it was she, and looked surprised when he saw her. Then his face contracted into a frown that was sullen and almost fierce in its expression. She was tremulous enough before, but she became more frightened than ever now.

'Dear Frank,' she said. 'Won't you forgive me? I was very silly and foolish, but I never meant any more than that. It was all nonsense, and nothing else. You know that, Frank, don't you?'

Her face became contorted like that of a child who is about to burst into tears. For all the contortion she looked very pretty, and there was something peculiarly touching in her fear and supplication. Trescoe had not been used to see his wife in that mood. He had never known her to supplicate to him before, or to be afraid of him. The novel fact that she was afraid of him brought a rush of pity into his heart. He felt for the moment angry with himself, because he had become thus an object of terror to the poor girl, whose control over him was once so complete. The changing expressions which passed across his face made Katherine believe at first that he was going to reject her appeal altogether. Indeed, he started and moved so suddenly the arm which she had touched, that she shrank back in terror, almost afraid that he was about to fling her away, or to strike her.

But Trescoe put his hand upon her shoulder, and drew her to him, and kissed her. 'Never mind, Kitty,' he said. 'Let us not think any more of this. You were silly, and perhaps I was too cross, and made too much of it. But I never thought badly of you; only I was devilishly annoyed, you know; one must be very much annoyed when he is as fond of a woman as I am of you, and when he thinks she is neglecting him and admiring some one else.'

'Oh, don't talk of that, Frank, please don't. I know how foolish I was; but they all admired him, and we all thought he was so good; and, indeed, I don't know anything bad about him now,' she added timidly, yet with a certain frankness which pleased him.

'Well, it is all over now, anyhow,' he said, 'and you and I are friends again, Kitty.'

'Papa will be so glad of this,' Katherine said.

She was happy again. She had not been happy for months, and at one time she was afraid that all was coming to an end

between her and her husband. Now peace was restored, and affection. But it must be said that she never recovered her former rule over Frank, or tried to have it. That is a sort of ascendency which, when once its spell has been broken, can hardly be restored to its old magic. Just as well for her and for him that it was not to be restored. He and she were happy, and she will get on better under the authority of a man than she could when she managed life for herself. She has found that Frank Trescoe is a stronger man than she thought, and he has found in himself the strength which he was too lazy to think of before, and they may be assumed to have bright days before them.

While this scene of reconciliation was going on in one room, Clement Hope had come to Geraldine in another. Their meeting was painfully embarrassed and constrained. Each was afraid of the other. Neither dared to give full liberty of expression, even to the eyes. As for Clement, he was utterly without a key to the mystery. He assumed that Geraldine had sent for him out of a feeling that it would be unkind not to see him before he went; and her well-meant kindness seemed but cruelty to him.

'You are going away?' said Geraldine.

'Yes, Miss Rowan; I have made up my mind. I think I had better go with Montana at once. It is no use staying here.'

'No,' Geraldine said; 'I suppose not. And when are you coming back?'

'Well, as to that, Miss Rowan, I don't think I am coming back at all.'

'Oh, you will surely come back,' Geraldine said; 'you can't leave England and all your friends for ever.'

'My friends can do without me, I fancy; and as for England, she can do without me; and, what is worse, I am afraid I can do without her. I am going in for a new life altogether, and, no—I don't think I shall come back, Miss Rowan, and so I will say good-bye, and I hope you will be very happy, you and Captain Marion.'

Geraldine held out her hand.

'You will write to me, won't you?' she said.

'Write to you?' Clement asked, looking at her with eyes of wonder.

'Yes,' Geraldine said in an almost imperious tone; 'you will write to me. I particularly wish you to write to me.'

'And you will answer the letter?'

'If I did not mean to answer the letter I should not ask you to write to me. I want to hear from you, Mr. Hope. Promise me you will write.'

'Oh yes, I will write,' Clement said eagerly. 'I am only too glad that you care to hear from me.'

'I do care to hear from you—you know it.'

'Good-bye,' said Clement.

'Good-bye,' said Geraldine.

One touch of their hands, and the parting was over, and Clement hurried downstairs with a strange impression that a totally unexpected hope was arising before him, and that the world and the future had suddenly, he could not tell how, become different for him from what they were an hour before. He was too confused to be able to analyse his own emotions, but his feeling as he came into the street, after having said good-bye to Geraldine, was not that of mere despair. It was not easy for him to say what had given him any ray of new hope. The very earnestness with which Geraldine had made him promise to write to her might after all have been only another evidence that she looked on him as her friend, and one who never could be anything more. Yet in her manner, in Captain Marion's manner, Clement thought he read some vague strange encouragement which he hardly dared to admit, and which yet he would not give up. What excuse for any hope could there be? he asked himself in bitter remonstrance with his heart; and still the heart answered that the excuse was found in Geraldine's eyes when he and she parted. Clement left London that night.

And now the day had come when the steamer was to carry Montana and his fortunes to the New World. It was a busy day in Aquitaine's house. Clement Hope had arrived in the town, and had been laid hands on by Mr. Aquitaine, and carried off to stay with him. Mr. Aquitaine indeed seemed anxious to get as many friends as he could into the house, and to allow Melissa and Montana and himself as little time as possible for reflection of any kind. Young Fanshawe was there too, and Sydney Marion, who had come down to see her old friend Melissa before the long talked-of Continental journey should take place, in which she and Captain Marion and the Trescoes and Geraldine were to begin to enjoy themselves at last. Perhaps out of all the company gathered together under Aquitaine's roof Sydney Marion had the best time of it. She was a good deal with young Fanshawe, and Fanshawe was very attentive to her,

and evidently began to find in her qualities of attraction which he had not noticed before. It is not very encouraging to a girl's self-love to be sought after and clung to when no other girl is near, but Sydney Marion had been condemned to a sort of second-class part all her life, and she was now growing used to it. She did not in the least blame young Fanshawe or anybody else for looking after a more attractive girl when the more attractive girl was near—she held that to be all fair and natural—and was well content, now that the more attractive girl was not in the way, to receive with a welcome such alms of attention as might fall to her share. Meanwhile let us say that she was doing a little injustice both to herself and to Fanshawe. She was a more attractive girl than she thought, and the unlucky fact which we mentioned early in this story, that her style of face was out of fashion, did not impress Fanshawe nearly as much as it would have impressed young men of more distinctly æsthetic tastes. In short, although Sydney did not then know it, young Fanshawe was beginning to see great charms as well as good qualities in her, was finding that he could not be so happy anywhere else as in her society, that he could not be happy when she was away; and probably Sydney Marion is not destined to a spinster's life after all.

Bright and crisp, with its touch of autumn chill on it, rose the day in early October when Melissa was to part from her husband, and he was to cross the Atlantic. She had stipulated that she was to go on board the steamer and see the last of him. She declared that she would not make any sort of a scene; and indeed her manner had been much too subdued of late to give her friends any dread on that score. Her father looked at her that morning with eyes of wonder. Was that his Melissa?—his little petulant, wild, uncontrollable Melissa,—that pale subdued, and silent girl? Was it happiness that had worked the change, or sorrow; the happiness of having her idol for a husband, or the sorrow of parting from him? Once Aquitaine could not have believed that either happiness or sorrow could work such a change in such a nature.

Montana had been up very early that morning, and was busy writing letters. One he gave to Mr. Aquitaine. 'I wish you would keep that,' he said, 'for the present, and open it when you hear from me; it only contains some instructions that I should like you to carry out about certain property I hold in trust, as I may say, for England. Don't you remember when I first came to London I made an appeal to the public to assist me?

Well, I got a good deal of money, and a great many things of value, chains and watches and jewels and bracelets and such affairs, and I have kept them. I have not touched any of the money, and the other things remain just as they were. Now a sort of feeling has lately been coming over me that as Englishmen are so much mixed up in this project of mine, the money raised in England ought to be spent for their benefit alone. I feel a sort of scruple that way. I think Clement Hope and you might arrange somehow for this to be done; so in that letter I just explain to you where the things are to be found, and what they are, and what I should like you to do with them. You will understand this better when you have read what I have written, but it is not worth troubling about just now.'

'All right,' Aquitaine said; 'I have got my sealed orders. I will open them when I get a word from you, and not before.'

'Not before,' said Montana gravely; 'that is, of course, unless something should happen which might make it necessary for you to open them without hearing from me, or in case you did not or could not hear from me. We are all mortal, you know, and something might happen.'

'Come, don't talk in that way, Montana. Think of poor Melissa.'

'I do think of her,' Montana said; 'and you will find something about her in that letter, if anything should happen. But I don't think I look a likely person to expect a premature cutting off. I rather fancy most insurance companies would insure my life on moderate terms, even now.'

'I dare say they would,' said Aquitaine; 'I should be very glad, if I were chairman of one of them. Your chest measurement would still recommend you to a dragoon regiment.'

Montana smiled with what might seem to be the gratified vanity of a man who, conscious that he has passed the prime of life, is pleased to hear that he still has the best attributes of youth—its muscular strength, its exuberant vital power.

'Yes,' he said; 'I feel a young man still. If I were to judge by my physical sensations, Aquitaine, my impression would be that I am destined to live for ever.'

A few hours more and they were on the deck of the steamer. Melissa was filled with thoughts of the day when, just on such a steamer's deck, and just at such an hour, she saw Montana for the first time. By an odd little coincidence, as she was passing from the gangway to the deck, her foot caught in a rope and she staggered; and Montana put his arm round her and sustained her almost exactly as he had done on that first day. The whole

scene was brought to her with a vividness as if it were present; and she felt her old feelings again, and could recall the strange shock of the new sensation and of the conviction which it brought along with it, that her life was changed for ever by that first meeting. Was she happy now, now that she had got all that her wildest longings could have asked for? No, she was not happy. It was not merely that the husband she adored was about to leave her for a while, though that was trouble enough too. It was the sad conviction, borne in upon her more and more with each new day, that, after all, he was not hers in the true sense, that he was still only her idol and her husband, and not in any sense her lover.

How like and how unlike all was to that day! There were Montana, and her father, and Sydney Marion, but not Geraldine Rowan, nor Katherine Trescoe, nor Frank, her husband. And Clement Hope was there now, who had not been there before. Poor Clement Hope! As Melissa thought of him in her patronising way, she felt almost tender towards him, and wondered whether he cared about her any more, and hoped he did not, and could not help observing that he seemed to have grown much more of a man than he was when she used to ridicule him for his too evident admiration. If Clement had grown very suddenly into a man, Melissa had grown very suddenly into a woman. All the old childishness was gone from her; and in the fulfilment of her uttermost desire she seemed to have come into the possession of all the gravity and all the sadness that manhood and womanhood bring with them. There were a few hasty words of parting, and directions, and injunctions on both sides, and shaking of hands here and there, and then a bell rang, and the prosaic call to those about to go ashore was shouted along the decks; and Montana kissed his wife, and she found her father helping her down the ladder into the tender, and the tender presently made for the shore, and the vessel went on her seaward way. Melissa slept that night in her old bedroom in her father's house as if she were a girl once more and nothing had happened, and felt with every pulse and breath that nothing was, or ever could be again, what it had been to her before.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

'IN THE DEEP BOSOM OF THE OCEAN BURIED.'

A VOYAGE has commonly three stages. There is the first stage of mere confusion and constraint—when no one knows his own

place or his neighbour; when everyone finds the others in his way and feels sure he shall not like them, and the general conviction is that the voyage will be very miserable, and that it will last for ever. Then comes the more satisfactory stage, when the passengers are getting used to the waves, and to their berths, and their neighbours, and the rocking dinner-tables; when friendships are rapidly formed and flirtations are sweet and easy to be had, and everyone is disposed to make the best of everything in a voyage which still, even to the happiest, presents itself as destined to be long. Then comes the third stage, when it is suddenly discovered that the voyage is nearly over, and people are looking back upon it with a gentle regret as on something already past, and are even anxious to put off the moment which is to take them from the free and happy indolence, the easy friendships, the cheap enjoyments of the deck to the cares of business and the crowd of cities again. Then the mind turns back, even to those early days of confusion and constraint, with a feeling of sweet regretful pleasure, like to that with which, as men advance towards the evening of life, they think of the very struggles and discomforts of its morning hours.

The voyage of Montana and Clement had reached this latter stage. Another day or two would see the steamer in New York Bay. The time had passed very quickly with Clement. It had passed almost too quickly; and he felt his heart throbbing with a positively painful excitement as they approached the shores of the New World in which he was to try for a new career. Montana had been very friendly with him all the way over; had kept aloof from the other passengers, and had spent most of his leisure hours with Clement. The nights were growing a little chilly, and few of the passengers cared to remain long on deck; but Montana and Clement tramped there for hours after the others had gone below. One night they thus walked the deck and talked together, and Montana began contrasting the conditions under which Clement was seeking the New World with those under which he himself had at such an age made a like adventure. His manner was especially encouraging and friendly.

'Everything seemed to be against me, then,' he said; 'and everything is in your favour now. You ought to feel very happy. I almost envy you your youth and your destiny.'

'But you have realised your destiny,' Clement answered. 'You have made a name; you are a man of the time. I have all the struggle before me; and shall probably fail; at least,' he added hastily, 'I shall probably fail in what I most wish

to do; and what is the good of anything if a man has not his heart's desire?'

'True enough,' Montana said. 'Most of us have known that. But I shouldn't think you would fail even in that.' He looked keenly into Clement's face for a moment.

'I don't believe in forecasting people's destinies, in the fortune-teller's sense, that is,' Montana went on to say, 'but I think a man who opens his eyes and watches quietly can tell in advance a good many things. I think I could forecast your destiny easily enough. Shall I do so?'

'I don't know whether I should like to have the curtain raised, even if it could be done. I am afraid it would be something dismal to see, and that if I have any gleam of hope at all it might be put out.'

Montana smiled and shook his head. 'I don't see the future for you in that light. I can tell you one part of your destiny, I think. I venture to believe that you are destined to return from America soon. Shall I go on?'

'Oh yes,' said Clement. 'Go on by all means. Tell me something pleasant if you can.'

'Yes; I think you are destined to come back from America, and to marry Miss Rowan.'

Clement started and felt himself grow red, and turned his head seaward. 'I don't see how that prophecy can be fulfilled,' he said. 'You don't know, perhaps, that Miss Rowan has found a destiny for herself.' Montana shook his head.

'I don't believe she will ever marry Marion, and I do Marion the justice to think that he would never have allowed the girl to throw herself away on him. No; take my word for it, Hope, that is your destiny, and a better destiny you could not have. Settle in America if you will, and found your colony there. I don't promise you much success in that way, but I think you will do well to stay in the States. After all, you will find there is something in living in a place where no man cares what your father was, or your grandfather. It is a silly feeling, perhaps, which makes one object to a society where one man is supposed to be better than another merely because he is a duke. But the feeling is in the nature of some of us; and the cowardly dread of being looked down upon as a person of low birth has made many a man do a mean and shameful act. All things considered, I think you would do well to settle in America. But I don't lay any stress on that. Only I think I have forecast part of your destiny, and the brightest part of it, too.'

Then they began to speak of other things; and naturally the talk soon turned on the purpose which each had in view when leaving England. Montana strongly advised Clement to give up all idea of a separate project of his own, and to go in with him in the enterprise which he described as already in hand. Clement was a good deal surprised at the earnestness with which Montana pressed this recommendation, and the stress which he laid upon the fact that Clement's project was still only a scheme on paper, whereas Montana had the lines of his enterprise already well laid down. Assuredly it seemed only reasonable that Clement should give all his energies to the enterprise that was actually in movement. But he was much surprised at the confident firmness with which Montana spoke of all his plans. Clement had often of late had a suspicion growing up in his mind that Montana was really taking no steps towards the carrying out of his scheme. It was not merely Matthew Starr's assertion which put this into Clement's mind. He had felt such a conviction growing in him, without prompting from anyone else. Now, however, it seemed impossible to doubt that Montana must have been silently working hard all the time in London to bring his project to a reality. Montana did not indeed tell Clement exactly what he had been doing, or describe to him in detail the precise steps he had taken, but he spoke of the project of the new colony as fully arranged for already. He impressed upon Clement that there was nothing to do when they landed in America, but to go straightway to the new commonwealth, and begin at once to lay out its lands and apportion its occupation. Even the population Clement understood to have been in a great measure provided for already. He certainly understood from Montana that there were settlers enough to make the beginning of the new community, who had arranged to be there to meet their leader on his arrival, and go to work with him at once. Clement became much impressed with the practical ability and the quiet organising power of Montana. All the time, then, that he and others believed Montana to have been wasting his time in London, dreaming and visiting, and making speeches, and attending dinner parties, and receiving compliments, it was plain that Montana must have been quietly and systematically working away at the details of his new organisation. Nothing seemed more natural than Montana's eager earnestness as he drew nearer and nearer to the scene of what would probably be the great enterprise of his life. In London he always talked reservedly and coldly of his project.

He seemed to put inquiry away—to be unwilling to approach the subject. Perhaps this very fact had given rise to some of the doubts in men's minds as to the reality or the practical existence of the project. But now, on the deck of the steamer approaching the shores of America, Montana seemed as if he could not be too earnest in impressing upon Clement the already accomplished success of the plan he had at heart. Clement thought of this long after, and with wonder. Surely if any man ever was in earnest Montana must have been in earnest that solemn night. Surely it was impossible to suppose that Montana all the time did not really believe in the existing reality of his enterprise.

When they parted for the night, Clement left his friend with the conviction that if there was in the world a man really eager to meet the coming days, longing to live for the sake of a great enterprise, and confident of his power to make it a reality, that man was Montana.

They went below together.

'Good-night,' Montana said, as they were parting; 'I feel inclined to sleep somehow—an unusual thing with me. I did not sleep much last night. I get more eager for this thing the nearer we come to it. I have been thinking about it all day, and about nothing else hardly. Somehow I feel tired, and I shall indulge myself with a good long sleep. Do you know what I am going to do?—an odd thing for me. I am going to sleep as long as ever I can to-morrow morning. I am not going to be called. For once I will give myself a sleeper's holiday, and have it out with nature.'

They shook hands warmly, and Montana turned in.

But Clement found before long that he had no inclination for sleep. He had half-undressed, when he suddenly changed his mind, dressed again and went on deck. He wanted to be alone, to think over what he had heard from Montana, and to compose his wild and rapidly growing hopes into something like calmness. He wanted to look the future, so far as he could venture to read it, steadily in the face, and see whether he could find any reality in the promises which seemed now to be so unexpectedly and so strangely held out to him. Clement was still of that age when we want the companionship of skies and stars to share our wild hopes with us, or to help us to tone them down. Skies and stars and rushing sea make glorious confidants for a youth in Clement's case; and here he had them all to his heart's content, and to himself. It was now

very late, and all the other passengers had long gone below. The night had become bright. The moon was shining now, which was not so before. There were some clouds here and there. The sea was smooth and silent. The throbbing of the engines, the rushing of the bows through the water alone disturbed the majestic stillness. Clement looked from the stern along the track left by the vessel as it passed. He questioned the future, and only began to feel more hopeful. Montana's words had impressed him deeply. Something in his own heart, some memories he could not define, some startled glances of Geraldine's, ratified the hope Montana had tried to give him. These hopes, and the beauty of the night, and the near approach of the end of the voyage, and the prospect of the new career so soon to begin, revived and strengthened him, and he felt just then as if he could not but take a bright look forward and believe that things would come well.

Suddenly it seemed to him that he heard a light splash into the sea, as if something had glided rather than fallen from the steamer's deck into the water. He had seen no one on deck, however, anywhere, except two or three seamen at their duties, who were still there. He might have ceased to think of it, but that looking out over the water there seemed to float past him the form of a man. At least he fancied for a moment that he saw between him and the water a white face, which flashed ghost-like out of the dark waves and then was gone. Clement was sure that some one had fallen overboard, and had been swept by the rush of the water far away to the stern. He did not lose a moment in acting on the thought. He shouted with all his might 'Man overboard!' and plunged into the steamer's foaming track. The cry was echoed, and in a moment there were hurrying men on the deck, and the passengers who lay below in their berths, or still sat in their staterooms or in the saloon and talked, were conscious of that strange alarming sensation which comes when on the ocean a steamer suddenly stops in her course. The engines are silent, the screw grinds and churns no more, the waters cease to rush noisily around the bows, and the vessel is motionless. Few sensations are more strange to the inexperienced than the awful stillness of such a moment. The sudden change from speed to motionlessness brings with it ominous suggestions of some danger, some impending calamity. The vessel was admirably ordered, and not many seconds had passed before a boat was lowered, and it made to the assistance of the struggling Clement, already far away in the sea.

Clement was a stout swimmer. In the seaport where he was brought up boys learned what real swimming means. The night was calm. He had keen sight. He had leaped into the sea the very moment he saw what he fancied to be the drowning man. He was borne along by the vessel's track in exactly the same direction. The moon was bright; the sky was clear; but he could see nothing on the surface of the water between him and the dim horizon. When he saw what he believed to be a face rise from the waves it was just in the moonlight, and he had struck out straight in the right direction, but he could see nothing now—nothing at all. For all the bitter chill of the sea—and how cruelly cold it was!—Clement trod water composedly, and looked all around him. He could see that the steamer had stayed in her course, and he heard commands shouted, and knew that a boat was being launched. In another moment or two he saw the boat rowing towards him, and heard the cheers of the sailors. For a moment he fancied that they had found the man whom Clement still supposed to be in the sea. But in another instant it was clear that they were making only for him—Clement—and were under the impression that he alone was overboard. They redoubled their cheers good-naturedly when they came up with him, and when he scrambled into the boat, and were very noisily glad of his rescue. It took some time before he could impress upon them that he had been in no manner of danger, that he had leapt overboard to save somebody who really was in peril, and whom they were bound to seek and rescue. They one and all treated his story as a mere delusion. The watch was clear that there was only one man overboard, and if he had jumped overboard under the impression that he was rescuing anybody, he was, they rather seemed to imply, a fool for his pains. Anyhow, no sight or sound of any swimmer in his agony vexed the quiet sea now.

Clement was brought back on board the steamer in rather ignominious plight. He had been dreaming, some of the passengers said. It was hinted that he was fond of composing poetry. Many persons were merely annoyed at having been wakened and disturbed by such a piece of illusion. A hasty examination of the vessel was made, and nobody was found missing; that is to say, all the passengers and crew who happened to be awake were accounted for, but there were several cabins the occupants of which had gone to rest, and locked the doors inside, and it was not thought necessary to waken the sleepers from their dreams. So all went to rest, and slept

quietly until morning. In the morning some surprise was expressed that Montana did not appear at breakfast—so marked a figure as his was likely to be missed; he did not make his appearance on deck after breakfast, and at last some one suggested that it would be well to knock at his door, and call him. Clement did knock at the door, and no answer came. Then the steward was sent for, and he knocked; and no answer still coming, the door of the room was forced open. Montana was not there, nor had his bed been slept in. His door had been locked, and evidently from the outside, and the key taken. Montana had not been seen by anyone since the night before, and he was not seen again. The steamer reached the quays of Hoboken, opposite New York, without him. All that could be said of him was that he was in the steamer one memorable night, and was not there the next morning.

Early in the morning of the day when Montana was missed, a restless girl far away in her North of England home was looking through her window on the waters of the river that rippled below. She could not remain in her bed—in her heart there was a kind of fighting that would not let her sleep. She opened the window and looked out. The dawn was coming up, and the river was just beginning to sparkle to the eastward with the rising rays; it looked peaceful, almost, one might say, a very type of tranquillity, that smooth flowing river, its surface hardly broken by a ripple.

Melissa might have found assurance for any uneasiness in the sight of that river and that sky. Nothing was there to tell of storm or to suggest danger to those who were on the sea. The girl was made a little more tranquil by the quiet beauty of the water and the sky. Certainly a quiet morning on an English river is no guarantee for glassy seas and soft breezes some two thousand miles away on the ocean; but it is the tendency of the human mind to find omens and auguries in everything, to discover encouragement and consolation where there is no real substance for either, and to extract despair from conditions that do not even warrant discouragement. So Melissa was beginning to be contented, and to tell herself again for the hundredth time every night and morning that her husband must be perfectly safe; that he must now be near the shores of America; that he had promised to telegraph to her the very moment of his landing, and that she might count on getting such a message from him within a day or two. Suddenly, however, the sky began to darken to the eastward. It was as if the sun had failed for

a moment to break through the mass of clouds. The water blackened, and it seemed to Melissa that a chilling bitter wind fell upon it and scourged it into a sudden roughness. Her agitated mind found terror in the slightest omen of darkness and danger; for a moment it seemed to her that a pale face rose out of the water and looked wistfully at her, and then appeared to float or vanish away along the darkened stream. It was only an instant that this strange illusion lasted, but it struck terror into Melissa's heart.

'He is drowned, I know he is drowned,' she cried aloud. 'There has been a wreck, and he is drowned; I shall never see him any more.'

Melissa's vision was doubtless mere illusion; her alarm may have been the offspring merely of an over-wrought and anxious mind; a sudden terror between dream and dream. But the omen of her disturbed morning was only too truly fulfilled—she never saw her husband more. She had had her highest wish in life realised, and it proved to be only emptiness and shadow; she had lived and loved, and had her love made happy for a brief moment, and then all was at an end.

Had Montana merely fallen overboard in the night and so perished? Had he deliberately put an end to his career? That no one ever can know. Taking all things into consideration, it became the settled conviction of Clement Hope that Montana had drowned himself. All that had passed on the night before his disappearance seemed now to point to such a purpose. The more Clement thought over it, the more he became convinced that Montana's conversation with him on that night was intended to lead Clement into the belief that Montana felt sure of a long and active career, and thus to throw a mystery over his disappearance. When he came to speak of it to Geraldine afterwards this was her conviction also. It seemed in keeping with all that each of them had known and believed about Montana that he should bring his career to a close in some manner which would glorify it with all the dignity of mystery. Long after, too, Geraldine told Clement what she believed about Montana and his father. She told him of the strange scene she had witnessed in old Mr. Varlowe's dying room, and the word she had heard Montana speak, and the answer that Varlowe had given. They two were inclined on the whole to form a lenient judgment on Montana, his self-delusions, his impostures, his theatric life, his belief in his vague and shadowy mission. They did not condemn him wholly. One

part genius, one part imposture, one part made up of a self-delusion amounting almost to insanity—such was in the mind of Clement and of Geraldine the composition of Montana's character. When Mr. Aquitaine came to examine the papers left by Montana in the charge of his bankers, he found a recently made will, which gave the whole of Montana's own property to Melissa. The property was large, and came to her at a time when it could be of no manner of use to her. Aquitaine for long after did not even tell her of the will. In an iron safe belonging to Montana Aquitaine found heaped up all the watches, bracelets, rings, chains, brooches, and money which had been bestowed in answer to Montana's appeal on the first night when he addressed a London audience. Some of the watches had stopped apparently at the very moment when they were allowed to fall into the picturesque urn provided for the contributions of the generous, and had not been wound ever since. Montana had taken no heed of them; he had allowed all the precious trinklets to remain untouched from that hour. Aquitaine, going over them with a sort of melancholy curiosity, and wondering whether it would be possible to restore any of them to their former owners, came on a bracelet which he well knew. It was one of a pair that he had given to Melissa on her birthday. It had been made after a fashion of his own, and it bore her name, and his, and her mother's, curiously interwoven. It was one of the offerings Melissa had made to her new idol that memorable night. Aquitaine took the bracelet out and kept it. 'I will give it back to her sometime,' he said to himself; 'but not now—not just now.'

Neither in England nor in America could Clement or Aquitaine find evidence to show that Montana had made any preparations whatever for his colonising enterprise. Clement carefully and quietly made search in America, and Aquitaine in England. It became plain to both of them that during all his stay in London Montana had not taken any step whatever towards the realisation of the object which professed to be that of his life. He had written to no one, directed no one, taken counsel with no one. Evidently the entire scheme was but a cloud, an illusion, something which Montana vaguely meant to attempt, if ever a convenient time should come. Doubtless this had weighed upon Montana's mind of late, and had helped to decide him in the course he took. A few days more and discovery and exposure would have been certain. Once he touched the shores of America it would have been impossible any longer to keep

up the delusion. Montana had in his characteristic fashion allowed the days and weeks and months to go by in London, always saying to himself that he would do something to-morrow or the day after, and doing nothing. As we have said before, and the point is necessary to any understanding of Montana's character, or even any reasonable conjecture that way, Montana was not a man of imagination, but only a dreamer. When action was forced upon him he could rise and act as a man can do who is startled out of a dream, but then this action was only like that of an awakened dreamer, sudden, swift, decided by chance, or impulse, or accident. From his point of view, if he were not to risk a mere ignoble exposure, there was really nothing left for him but some sudden and striking close of his whole career. The curtain had to fall somehow, and it was characteristic of Montana that he should have preferred to bring it down in a way which would leave the close of the drama a mystery.

Melissa bore the news when it was made known to her with much greater composure than might have been expected. She persisted in saying that she knew it would be so, that from the morning when she looked out in the dawn she knew that Montana was lost to her for ever. 'It could not end happily,' she said; 'there could be no happiness come out of it for him, and it is better for me as it is. Now I shall have him always with me. Nothing can change him or take him away from me any more.'

Mere despair had with her taken the place of fortitude or of Christian resignation. She refused to listen to any words of consolation, and cared nothing for sympathy.

'I have to live,' she said, 'and I must only put up with it.'

To her father she once said with a wan, wild smile: 'Don't be afraid that I shall do anything to myself. I'd rather live, dear, ever so much. I might find out if I died, in the other world, you know, that he did not care about me any more; so I'd rather live and keep him always with me here.'

And so Montana disappeared. Nothing was ever heard of him again. The common accepted belief, which no one who had reason to think otherwise ever cared to discredit, was that he had merely slipped over the side of the steamer somehow, and been drowned. To none except to Clement and Geraldine and Aquitaine did it occur to think that the act had been the deliberate and dramatic close of a mysterious career. But among Montana's own special admirers and followers there were

many who refused to accept any story which started on the assumption that Montana was gone for ever. Hundreds and thousands of men and women in America and in England still believe that Montana will return; that whether the ocean did close over him or not, their leader and prophet will come back all the same, and be with them once again to redeem them from their hard lot, and bring them into a new bright life of health, and happiness, and freedom. Little organisations, and societies, and branches are still formed now and then in back settlements of London, and Liverpool, and Glasgow, and New York, and Cincinnati, which bear the name of Montana; and many a theory and doctrine is preached in Montana's name which probably never entered into his mind, or could be reconciled with any of his avowed principles. Here and there, then, amongst little knots of devoted followers, he will be remembered; and indeed, as times goes on will be transformed in their memory from what he really was to something altogether different, each edition differing from each—a new Montana having come up from beneath the ocean in a different form for each different group of devotees. But the world in general will soon forget him. He had his ambition, however. He was the 'Comet of a Season,' and disappeared like a comet, no one knew whither.

THE END.

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